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The Quincunx Case



LIAM DENT FITMAN

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THE QUINCUNX CASE

THE QUINCUNX CASE

BY

WILLIAM DENT PITMAN



BOSTON
HERBERT B. TURNER & CO.
1904

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Second Edition

THE QUINCUNX CASE

“As for the delights, commodities, mysteries, with other concernments of this order, we are unwilling to fly them over—and therefore shall enlarge with additional ampliations.”

SIR THOMAS BROWNE: *The Quincunx mystically considered.*

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To H. S. H. Prince Florizel of Bohemia:

MY DEAR PRINCE:

It is some years since we talked upon the Quincunx, of number One, number Two, and, more particularly of number Four, and doubtless much of the matter has passed from your mind. For myself I might say the same, were it not that a sprained ankle, a balcony at Castellamare, and a touch of ambition literary, have combined irresistibly to recall them.

I have often made the observation (as no less a man than Goethe before me) that life casts itself spontaneously into drama upon our small whirling planet. Should any one be tempted to deny the romance of actuality, let him turn the following pages in repentance. Surely never man had more whimsical experiences than myself, enjoyed them less at the moment, or more in the retrospection. Once, only, may I say truly, did the prize of honor and gold taste as sweetly in the mouth, as the remembrance of winning it, and that was when I was permitted the honor of bearing you company among the Mediterranean Islands.

'Tis in memory, therefore, of those blue days and fiery nights; of our talk; of your incomparable chef; of your tobacco; and of yourself, suave, inimitable and urbane, that I venture the following narrative. Would it were in that English which you enrich with the accent of Bohemia!

Your friend,

PHILIP ADRIAN.

THE QUINCUNX CASE

CHAPTER I

BY WAY OF A PROLOGUE

"My suggestion is", she began, eyeing the heap of notes and silver before us on the table, "an automobile hansom to the Waldorf, (we've a moment to stop on the way for a bunch of violets,) and after dinner, an hour or two at the theatre. Then another hansom to—anywhere—for supper"

"And after supper?" I queried, with an accent of fine sarcasm.

"Oh, after supper—" she replied bravely, "the linen room at the Institution for Decayed and Indigent Gentlewomen."

"Where they will allow you, I understand, a scuttleful of coal and a baked potato daily?"

"Not potatoes, my dearest boy, rice! Potatoes are too costly for the indigent gentlewomen. But what matter? We'd have had one good time together."

She smiled at me, and I knew of course that she meant it. The occasion was intended to be a serious discussion of our finances, beginning

by a preliminary skirmish through all my coat pockets, and her dear little purse and chatelaine bag, and the result, in tangible moneys, reached the encouraging total of thirty-one dollars and forty-three cents. Between this sum, and the one at which I had arrived with a pencil on the back of an envelope, there existed the same gulf as once between Dives and Lazarus, and with as little chance for meeting.

"You see," I argued, for she looked distractingly pretty and worried in the lamplight, "the trouble is with you and me. We are much too young, younger, I find, than is customary in New York. This is a difficulty I shall overcome, but you, never! During all our acquaintance you have grown steadily younger."

"Heaven be praised!" cried she, and added with fervent irrelevance, "I should hate so to be a hag, Phil!"

"You will never be, my dear, you couldn't."

"Particularly", she continued, her face clouding, "in view of the truth—"

"You mean because you actually have the seniority by a few years? I am convinced that is a mistake; it never happened. I love you dearly, but you are much younger than I, and must do as I say."

She laughed. "You absurd boy! Don't I always?"

"No, not always", I replied a little sadly, and there was a pause. She looked at me out of the tail of her eye and then came and put her arms around my neck over the back of my chair.

"Is there such a dreadful difference" she asked, "between what we've spent here and *that?*"

She indicated our personalty with a gesture.

"There is an appalling difference."

"But how did it happen—I thought I was so careful!"

"So did I."

"It is all my fault," she said. "We ought never to have come here at all. But I felt so sure you would get a position!"

"On the contrary, it was I who insisted on it, it is I who have dragged you into this—into the Indigent Gentlewomen."

"How can you say that, Phil?"

We both felt better after these handsome assumptions. Meanwhile Dives, represented by a row of figures on the envelope lay on the floor glaring at Lazarus, sorry and inadequate, on the table. She asked me by and by what

the figures were, which was self-sacrificing on her part, for she hated calculations.

"We've spent in a month", I answered, indicating Dives, "the stipend of the well-to-do, and we've only got *that*", indicating the \$31.43 representing Lazarus, "to pay it with."

"We can't possibly manage it?" she ventured.

"There is a current belief, my dear, that we cannot, but it is founded on mathematics which you do not understand."

She continued to stroke my hair softly, in the way she did when I was tired. "You mean it's the difference between three and six?"

"More like three and twelve." I said gloomily.

"Well, but if so", her face brightened,— "nobody can expect it, you know, and we might just as well have one pleasant evening. Shall I ring for the cab?"

I glared at her, but I knew her to be incorrigible, young as she was.

"You seem to forget, my dear!" I said, "that this is a boarding-house and our week is up to-morrow. That money isn't yours or mine— what there is belongs to the people here."

Perhaps my tone was harsh, at any rate her

eyes filled with tears. "Oh Phil!" she cried out, "I believe you're sorry we did it! I believe you wish we hadn't come!"

"My dear mother!" I ejaculated, and she stopped, because that is a name I never call her unless I am displeased with her. I was just going to protest with vehemence, when there came a knock at the door.

Although our week was not up till afternoon, and no one knew of the fiscal fiasco but ourselves, yet such is the ugly influence of liability that my heart gave a nervous thump; and I felt reluctant to open the door to a possibly raging landlady. However, I did it, while my mother hastily dried her eyes in a corner, and it was nobody but Peter, the buttons, with a letter.

"And forwarded from home!" was my comment as I gave it to her, and picked up Dives from the floor, with repugnance. But when glancing at the postmark, she called out "Uncle Adrian!"—I went quickly to read it over her shoulder.

"ASHUELOT, N. H., June 1.

"MY DEAR SISTER:

It is some years now since we met, and your son Philip must be of an age when the question of his position in the world is of great impor-

tance. I have long had it in mind to give him a start and in order to judge of his character and abilities, would like to have him visit us for a month or so this summer. Why should he not start at once? He will find a very quiet household, for I am quite an invalid, and my daughter is good enough to indulge me; but it is the only way in which I can form an opinion of his fitness for a mercantile career. My obligations to his father and pleasant memories of yourself make me anxious to be of service. Hoping to hear favorably from you and from him, I am always affectionately,

JOHN ADRIAN.

P.S. I enclose a check for Philip's expenses."

My mother and I looked at each other, and then in silence took our chairs again.

"Iced obligations and cold storage memory!" I said a little bitterly.

She shook her head in silence, and then rested her chin on her hand. I could see that her thoughts had flown back to the past.

Anyone living in the last quarter century must have heard of the Adrian Leather Works. A large village supplied homes for its workmen, and immense buildings housed its machinery. The man whose signature I had just read was the one whose energy and

industry had erected that village and those factories—my father's step-brother, a personality as dry as sand. The difference in age between my uncle and my father had been less great than the difference in their temperaments, for Mr. John Adrian had been a man of business through and through; Philip, his brother, only a man of parts. My father's marriage had seemed the culmination of his imprudences to the richer man, whose interest in him, never great, from that point appeared to cease entirely. Fortunately for Philip Adrian, his wife was one of those rare women who make life picturesque with her humor and color. He had talents and tastes, but they were not of the kind for which America pays highly at the present day. She knew his weaknesses, but would not have exchanged them for the virtues of his half-brother. She was the bravest and most devoted of wives, and when he died, although her life might truly have been described as a hard one, she looked upon herself as a woman chosen by fate to have experienced the highest form of happiness.

This was the atmosphere of my boyhood, one of pride and joy and endurance; her humor and her spirit making easy the hardest path.

We settled in a small town, and she taught music and painting; was loved, and busy and successful, till I was old enough to test fortune also.

We managed during these years to forget all about Uncle Adrian and his enormous wealth. Sometimes his name, or more often his daughter's in the newspaper, recalled to my mother the one visit, which, during her engagement, she had made under his roof. She would repeat once more, with her inimitable mimicry, their conversation on the subject of money, his clumsy effort to warn her, his disgust at her attitude. Then we would laugh together and talk of something else, and certainly she never wondered that this man of large means had forgotten the existence of his brother's wife and child.

Unfortunately for my mother (I use this word though it makes her fiery) her son was very like his father. My education had been good, and I was studious and romantic. Very young, I managed to get pupils, and I taught for five years contentedly, until that fateful day when a leading magazine accepted my short story. The sum we received (for the work was half my mother's) seemed enormous at

the rate per hour, and I see now that it sent us at once off our heads. I gave up a good pupil in order to work harder, and when a second acceptance followed, became giddy enough to do anything she might propose. We had little economies, we had enterprise, and one fine March day (will it be believed?) we left our satisfactory small home, cut our cables, burnt our boats, and set off for New York, where I was instantly to obtain a salaried literary position. I was twenty-six and romantic, and you have already seen what she was.

Three delightful months followed. The bright city, the shops, the pictures and music, were to her an intoxication; and at no time prudent about money, she grew positively reckless. I visited polite editors, received compliments and vague suggestions; and never dreamed, poor devil, of their smiles behind my back. Our little economies went in vast extravagances, till the latter part of May brought the first doubts and dreads. My mother, who was courageous if not practical, had gone so far as to consult such friends as she had in town, and there seemed a chance that if the worst came to the worst, she might obtain charge of the linen-room at the Indigent Gentlewomen. We

had jeered at this scornfully enough at the first, but now it began to look imminent for all our jeers.

All this, running through my mind in the pause, set me contemplating her face and the letter in her hand. I felt an instinctive dislike to Uncle Adrian, a repugnance to the visit; and I saw that she, too, was struggling with pride and dislike. But I knew I must go, and I must make her wish it.

So I said, "I wish he had asked you too, dear! The country is exquisite now!" in tones of mingled satisfaction and regret. She looked up quickly.

"*You want to go?* Why, I feared"
and she broke off.

"Perhaps not altogether,—but he means it well. And have we really any choice?"

"I suppose not", she said wistfully, "but after all these years, I rather hate to begin to take from him now!"

"I know, dear, how you feel—", I was beginning, when my eye caught the folded check lying ignored on the carpet, and I picked it up and showed it to her.

"It makes Dives quite able to look Lazarus in the face," I said cheerfully, watching her

expression; “and do you know, I really think after all, we shall be able to have our one pleasant evening together!”

And I actually took her to the theatre.

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY AND THE LITTLE SCRAP OF PAPER

An early sunbeam, entering my room, awoke me, and I lay drowsily awhile, tasting the air with its subtle suggestion of space and height, of forest, and the freshness of the pine. My bed, into which I had tumbled gratefully after my long journey the night before, was a big four-poster, but with a filmy canopy instead of the old-fashioned stuffy curtains. It was high and broad like the room, and both pleased me, as my eye ran over the clean white walls, the bare painted floor, the pieces of old furniture, the smirking portrait in an oval gilt frame over the mantel, the Franklin stove, and the wash-stand service of splendid Chinese porcelain.

The open window framed a mass of green boughs, shot with sunshine and stirred now and again with the notes of a bird. They brought back to me the remembrance of my long drive, after I had alighted at the little railroad station, and left its lamps and noise

behind. The carryall had jogged on, and I had dozed within it, rousing always to see the mysterious shadows cast by its lantern upon the thickets on either hand, to note that we passed through perpetual forest, the boughs seeming to dissolve as we approached. The woods were full of pleasant sounds, small brooks gurgling through the roots of the rhododendrons, the steady pouring of the summer wind among the trees, and now on one side and now on the other of the road, the shouting of a considerable stream. It had been dim and dreamy for mile after mile, and I had hardly noted that we passed near bulks of building whose chimneys cut the clear starry sky. After this we climbed a long steep hill, turned sharply at the top between high gateposts, and drew up before a brilliant doorway. It was too dark to see anything of the house, beyond that it was large and square and white, with a pillared portico. I was still half asleep as I gathered my wraps, and stumbled up the steps, instinctively toward the light of cheerful wood-fire in the hall. Not till I had reached it, did I notice the tall young woman who stood in a nearby doorway, and surveyed me.

We shook hands somewhat awkwardly.

"Is this my cousin Philip?" she said. "I am Cecil."

Her voice was low and clear, and that was my chief impression as I followed her into a sitting-room opening out of the hall. Here were warm crimson walls and high book-cases, another good fire, and on a round table in the centre a little supper was set forth. It was all totally different from what I had anticipated—much simpler, more homelike, more unpretentious. There was no sign of a servant, nothing to ruffle the pride of a poor relation. I must have glanced about with this in mind, for Miss Adrian's next remark had a note of apology.

"My father can never break a habit," she said smiling. "He has gone to bed at ten o'clock for thirty years, and that is the reason he is not here to welcome you." I disclaimed the idea of wishing Uncle Adrian to put himself out, and there fell another pause. My cousin motioned me to the table.

"You must be very hungry and tired," said she. "Won't you help yourself?"

I was not very hungry, but I took the chair she indicated, and as I hoped, she seated herself opposite, resting her arms on the table

and began to study me under the lamp-light. I was not the person to omit to repay the compliment and for a few moments we exchanged the most reflective scrutiny until a certain humor (also unexpected,) began to glow in my cousin's eye, and at a touch we fell agreeably into laughter.

"Please forgive me," she cried, still laughing, "but you are so ——so different from what I thought!"

"I was about to say the same," I retorted.

"Preconceived ideas," said my cousin, "are very dangerous. When did you get yours?"

"Oh, I've a vivid imagination", I went on giddily, "and the newspapers". But here I stopped and again we both laughed.

Miss Adrian, however, soon became grave. "We must be careful," she said, lowering her voice, "or we will wake my father!"

This was the very last thing I desired, so I sunk my own voice to nearly a whisper, and she was obliged to lean her head nearer to hear me.

"You haven't told me how I am different."

"Well you see," she confessed, "I knew you had been tutoring, so I expected a much—much——."

"Graver pedagogue, with eye-glasses and a dictionary? I'm sorry to disappoint you!"

"But I'm not disappointed—won't you have another glass of wine?"

Her manner changed delightfully into that of the hostess. The supper was delicious, and I began to entertain higher hopes of the pleasures of my visit. On the crimson wall opposite there hung a large old-fashioned mirror, and it reflected, as if framing a picture, the table with the lamp hung low over it, my hostess and myself. My ideas on her appearance had been formed from my knowledge of her father's wealth, and an occasional line from the newspaper. I had fancied a good-humored, bouncing girl in noticeably magnificent clothes, and my first glance had been for a pair of diamond earrings. Instead of this I saw a slender, light-footed, plainly dressed young woman of twenty-three or four. Her pale brown hair was taken back from a heart-shaped face in a way to accentuate that outline. Her eyes, which were blue, or gray, or green, had a mingling of reserve and humor. Her features, if irregular, were full of a certain quality, which my want of knowledge could only denominate character. Her manner was elusively playful, with dignity

just ready to protest; and there were latent possibilities of spirit and *abandon* about the corners of her mouth, which were there for the undoing of any man who loved power. What she had expected of me,—Heaven alone knew!—but I remember growing critically analytical at my own reflection in the mirror; and deciding that the strong looking young man, with the steady blue eyes and quick smile, had far too much *verve* and gesticulation and general vivacity for the pedagogic rôle. And there was, even then, a subconsciousness that an imaginative, concentrated temperament, a dramatic sense, and a distinct literary bent added still greater unfitness, therefore, that the mirror framed some very pretty possibilities.

Our conversation had been quietly cut short by Cecil's rising to show me to my room, yet it had left me with the desire to continue it on the morrow. All these recollections, and the excitement of such new experiences ran through my mind on awaking and made staying in bed impossible. Six o'clock had not yet struck, but I decided to accept the invitation of the sun to explore my surroundings.

The garden shone with dew, and a hundred early rose bushes perfumed the June air. The

grounds were not large, but the trees were old and fine, with beds of lilies-of-the-valley and fern planted among them. The house stood high and commanded a view of the purple and golden valley and of the rolling New Hampshire hills. I wandered to the gate, then out upon the high-way, and some yards down the hill, came upon a cross-road. One branch was evidently that which I had taken the night before, for it led steeply down to where I saw buildings, heard the rattle of machinery and noted the veil of smoke. I was in no mood for the factory, so I took the other branch, and lit a cigarette preparing to enjoy myself. A quarter of a mile further on, I came to where a huge oak jutted into an angle of the road. Its roots were mossy and gnarled and formed a natural seat, tempting to the philosopher, which gave a view of the only habitation in sight, a small, old, deserted stone cottage. This was of a shape common in New England, two-storied, with a hipped roof, a tumbledown outhouse attached to one end. A creeper hid the other with a mass of green, relieved against the silver hue of the weather-worn shingles. Among the weeds in the door-yard, a few flowers still bloomed; but the whole place was utterly ruinous and dilapidated.

The picturesqueness of the building pleased me, although I had a passing wonder that Uncle Adrian allowed such neglect so near his own house. Some purplish flower nodded against the broken window, and chimney-swallows flew briskly about the roof. I drew out my pocket sketch-book and began a rapid outline, whistling as I worked, and with my thoughts hovering pitifully over the loneliness of my little mother left behind. Of course, Uncle Adrian's check had done away with any idea of the Indigent Gentlewomen, but even in her pleasant lodgings I knew she would be shedding a few tears.

Whatever may be the hesitation of the dramatist, life never hesitates to bring together the hour, the circumstance and the man. I know not which of the Olympians had me in hand that morning and led me to the oak-tree, thus making me a witness at an hour when witnesses were unlikely. I had been ten minutes at my sketch when I saw the old station-wagon, the same which had brought me last night, climb slowly up the hill and stop at the gate of the house I was drawing. I recognized the lean, white horse, and rusty leather curtains, and wondered what purpose took it to a place so obviously deserted. The horse backed round

at the gate like a mechanical toy, and his driver leaned back and held some conversation with the person or persons in the darkened interior: then I saw the door of the wagon open, and the figure of a young woman appeared and jumped lightly to the ground. I was not near enough to distinguish her features, which by the way were hidden in a white veil, but I noticed the pink-and-white freshness of her summer dress, the deeper colored roses on her large hat, and the gleam of something like a jewel at her wrist. She did not pause, but walking rapidly up the cottage path, put a key in the lock, struggled with it a moment, then opening it, disappeared inside. The wagon remained drawn up at such an angle that it was impossible to see if she had been its only occupant. I paused in my sketch, interested to know what took this lady into such a dusty and ruinous place, and kept my eyes on the door until I saw her re-appear. She held her dress daintily high with one hand, and in the other was a sheet of paper, which had certainly not been there before.

I jumped up and moved a pace or two nearer, to see her run back to the wagon, and hand this sheet of paper to someone within. Then with

her foot on the step, she waited, gesticulating freely meanwhile, though the wind carried her voice away from me. I craned my neck to see the second person alight, but instead saw only a pair of hands flash from the shadow of the vehicle, tear the paper across and across into several pieces and throw them out upon the morning breeze. I saw the white fragments scatter along the road and catch in the grass; there followed some further talk, the lady evidently suggesting a return to the hut, the hands gesticulating angrily in reply; then she mounted the wagon, the door shut upon them and the horse jogged off in the way he had come.

My imagination played fancifully about this incident while I finished my drawing until the tones of a distant bell striking eight o'clock recalled me to my relatives and breakfast. I therefore put away my sketch-book and walked briskly back to the house. Entering the crimson sitting-room where I had been received the night before, I found myself in the presence of Cecil and of a short, gray, elderly man, who could be no other than my Uncle Adrian.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST ACCOUNT OF BALSAMO

"Humph, glad to see you!" grunted my uncle, as he shook hands. He gave me a glance over his eye-glasses, and then fell ravenously upon the financial page of the New York Evening Post. I was very willing to turn from him to Cecil, who was full of hospitable enquiries.

"So you've been exploring the country already," she said. "I hope it wasn't because you slept badly?"

"You say that to a man just come from a hall bed-room of a Harlem boarding-house! On the contrary, I waked up from sheer delight and to the sound of the birds."

"And you went out without your breakfast!" she observed.

"Who could think of breakfast on such a golden morning?"

I was trying to make out the real color of her eyes—a tint between green and gray, strange and beautiful—and I really had forgotten Uncle Adrian; so, when he grunted

again, I jumped, and saw his spectacles fixed on me, above the Post.

"You're like your father, Philip," he remarked.

I mumbled something to suggest that I was complimented by the comparison.

He gave a sour laugh. "Don't suppose for an instant that I consider the resemblance an advantage!" he said amiably, and I saw Cecil's face swept with color at his tone. Breakfast at this point was announced. Uncle Adrian folded up his Post, and with the air of one who has finished his religious exercises for the day, filed it carefully away upon some heaps of the same frivolous literature and marched into the dining-room.

We seated ourselves round a table, upon which was presently placed a huge New England breakfast. I caught myself wondering where on earth in Uncle Adrian's spare, lean frame, he put so much beefsteak and hot cakes, and baked beans and coffee. My Uncle looked at my plate with the strongest disapproval.

"No man ever did a square morning's work on an egg," he commented as I cracked the shell, and this was his only remark during the first half of the meal. However, during my

conversation with Cecil I caught once or twice his little eye fixed keenly on me, and I do not know why, but the glance had the odd effect of a stimulus. Several times I made Cecil laugh, and I could see by her expression that it was not habitual with her breakfasting.

"So you are one of these lively talkative young fellows," said he suddenly after a long silence. "Well, well, that's like your father, too. Phil always had lots to say, but tongue never filled the till that I could see."

His manner was so markedly ungracious that I could only judge it to be purposely so, and although my face flamed, I held my tongue. His next remark showed me that I was right, for he went on rather more cordially: "You can hang on to yours when you have to, anyhow."

There followed a pause, and during it I met the apologies and entreaties of Cecil's eyes. It was on their account that I spoke again.

"Tell me about that ruined cottage down the road," I said; "it looks as if there might be a story about it."

"You must mean Balsamo's cottage, I think. You are right, it is picturesque. To begin with it's one of the oldest buildings about here."

"I looked for the date," said I, "while I was sketching the place," and I took out my book to show her the drawing.

"Why, that's capital, Philip!" she cried evidently once more at ease. "The creeper, and the overgrown garden, are charmingly done. But the imaginary girl on the door-step is out-of-place," she added, "for no-one will go near the cottage any more."

"Really?" I cried much interested. "Then I wonder who was the girl I saw go in there this morning?"

The question had altogether disproportionate effect upon both Cecil and her father. He frankly stared at me, and she cried out quick and eagerly:—

"A girl in Balsamo's cottage, this morning? Impossible!"

Briefly as I could I described the whole incident; Uncle Adrian listened with the closest attention and followed with a question.

"You say the pieces of paper this girl had were thrown away, then and there? You are perfectly sure?"

Wondering more and more, I replied that I was. My uncle arose.

"It wouldn't hurt to try," he said as if to

himself, and then aloud, "Cecil, if you have finished your breakfast, take Philip with you and see if you can find any of those scraps of paper."

"Certainly, Papa."

"There was not much breeze," I said; "they cannot have gone far. But why are you both so interested—what's the mystery?"

My uncle fairly snarled. "Young man this is a matter of business, it isn't a dime novel!" he said roughly, and was about marching away toward his little study when his daughter touched him on the arm.

"You know I don't agree with you, Papa," said she, "I think it is much more than business—the whole affair was so extraordinary. You have no objection to my telling Philip?"

Evidently she took his silence for consent, for she led the way swiftly out on the veranda. Then she turned to me:

"I always forget," she said apologetically, "that what meant to me merely an exciting story, was to Papa a big disappointment, the biggest he ever had. He has been so used to success that he can't bear the idea even now."

I saw her effort, and could not but like her for it.

"I am to hear the story, am I not?"

"By and by," she answered, "but we must look for those papers first."

We set off together briskly down the road. The sun touching her hair gave its pale coils more life than they seemed to have the night before. The shape of her face and setting of her eyes were fascinating in their irregularity. The night before I had thought her elegant and elusive; here, in her short skirt and active step she was all directness and simplicity, and always dominating these was a sense of strength and reserve.

We walked straight to the tangled weedy growth, where I had seen the unknown throw the scraps of paper; and I confess that when I drew near I repented of my confidence as to finding them again. Most of the fence had rotted down and the grass ran wild into the road. But the earlier breeze had died, the ruined hut seemed absolutely deserted, and we bent at once to our search, parting the weeds and grasses and bending low over the roadside ditch. My cousin found the first piece, and a moment later I held up triumphantly what seemed to be the page of an old note-book all but torn in half.

"Do you think there are any others?" Cecil asked me.

"I was too far away to tell exactly," I replied, "though she could not have carried many from the ease with which they were torn. Let us look down the road the way the wind was blowing."

"You say there were two people?" she continued, as we walked.

"Yes, but I saw only the hands of the second, and do not know if it was a man or woman—see, isn't that a piece in the ditch?"

It was a quarter of a page, and further on we found a fourth piece. Here, however, our discoveries ended. Although I had certainly seen many more pieces flying to the winds, yet the most careful search failed to find them. So finally, breathless with stooping, we gave it up.

"Don't you think I deserve a reward now?" I begged her. "I have not even asked a question. Here is this comfortable root where I sat this morning, out of the sun. I will sit at your feet, and you shall tell me the story."

She assented, and in the cool shade, she gave me what I have since come to call the first account of Balsamo. Her narrative as here

set down is copied from my old diary of that time. It is therefore not in Cecil's own words, for she told it on that day rather badly, and was too frequently interrupted by my questions.

Joseph Balsamo, the chemist, came to the Adrian Leather Works through the recommendation of their Boston agent. Nominally, the post was one of chemist temporarily employed for the purpose of testing and investigating some new, foreign leather process. Really, the situation had been offered Balsamo because the agent led Uncle Adrian to believe that he was a man of important and original talent, on the eve of making a discovery likely to revolutionize the treatment of patent leathers.

It is not my purpose, nor is it necessary to go into the question of patent leather processes in these pages. Enough to say that up to this time no such leather could be guaranteed from cracking, owing to the fact that the French method killed the skins, which sooner or later must disintegrate. All processes then in use were variations on this one, and subject to the same disadvantage. The plan on which Balsamo hoped to set to work was one totally new and untried. His experiments were in the nature of a chemical formula producing a sub-

stance which was flowed on to the leather, whether in skins, or made-up, leaving the leather itself in its originally fresh, elastic condition. Such a process was better and cheaper; and the probable profits, as figured out by Uncle Adrian, were enough to fire even his damp and chilly imagination, and cause him to bear with something very like patience the chemist's eccentricities.

Cecil's description of Balsamo omitted none of his peculiarities. She seemed rather to wonder that one so antagonistic to her father should have yet succeeded in convincing him. Of Balsamo's past history, even of his nationality, very little was known. It was his fancy to claim that he was a direct descendant of the famous Count Cagliostro; but this had been probably inspired by a slight likeness to the portraits of that mysterious personage. He spoke French and Italian better than English, and he had a tremendous outpouring of language in these tongues. When alone he muttered and gesticulated, and notwithstanding his apparent peaceableness, he was a figure to be avoided in the dusk by the nervously inclined. But if at times he acted like a crazy man, at others he seemed more than usually

sane. When he first came to the Adrian Works he was entirely alone, but later he appears to have produced a wife and daughter—the latter about Cecil's own age. The wife, an equally foreign person, did not inhabit the cottage with him, but settled in the town some ten miles distant, and the little girl vibrated between her two parents. The villagers and work-people pitied the thin, shy, morose creature clinging to her odd father's arm, and were glad when she was sent to a distant convent school.

I should have mentioned here that the arrival of Balsamo and his family took place during Cecil's last year at school; followed by her trip to Europe and appearance in the gay world. When she returned to her home she found her father very tired of being perpetually disappointed by Balsamo, and of his never-ending requests for more money. There had been angry scenes and threats from Uncle Adrian of withdrawing his protection; but oddly enough, he seemed to believe in the man's ability, and to be unwilling to let him go. On his part, the chemist talked wildly, grew more morose and peculiar, was given to vanishing and leaving his laboratory for days at a time, and otherwise tried Mr. Adrian's patience to the full.

Matters were certainly more strained than Cecil liked. While Balsamo had always been fawningly polite to herself, yet she distrusted his thin-lipped, lined face, and the eyebrows raised on the temples over the smouldering eyes. She begged her father to dismiss the man, but he, although furious at the waste of time and money, seemed certain that Balsamo was nearing an important result.

This was the situation in May, three years back, when Cecil invited a house-party of friends to Ashuelot for the first and last time. Her father, who was always liberal to her, made every effort, got up riding-parties, dinners and dances that must have made his house unwontedly bright. Personally he took little interest in his guests, for he was absorbed in the chemical experiments, every day going to Balsamo's laboratory in the expectation of final and conclusive results, yet every day put off with evasions and further requests for money. Then it was that for the first time he began to doubt the man's good faith. Some-one must have hinted that Balsamo was playing with him, was holding back his discovery, or in secret treating with a rival firm. This suspicion seems to have taken strong hold of Uncle Adrian, and in-

furiated him. On the day the house-party was to break up with a final dance, there was an unusually violent scene between the two men in Mr. Adrian's study. Cecil, frightened, she knew hardly why, heard it from an adjoining room. Balsamo demanded money. Mr. Adrian positively and finally refused it, and requested the formula of the process in writing according to contract. The other met his request with actual tears, and piteous acknowledgments of failure, but held out great hopes along a new line of experiments to be undertaken so soon as he was supplied with means. Mr. Adrian with another curt refusal rose to end the interview. But the chemist added prayers to his facile tears, asserted his wife's extravagance, her debts, his inability to meet them, and repeated over and over that he was a desperate man. Cecil, trembling in the next room, overheard her father's final "no," and rejoiced at the silence in which Balsamo left the house.

She saw him shamble down the hill, but a sinister impression remained when he had gone.

That night she and her guests danced late. It was well after midnight when a pistol shot rang out from the second floor, followed after an instant of deathly silence, by a second. The

men precipitated themselves in the direction whence the shots had come, but in the confusion, several minutes passed before they gathered before a bed-room door.

The occupant of this room—M. du Caylus, one of Cecil's intimate friends,—had left the ball-room twenty minutes before, complaining of a headache. He was therefore the only person upon the second floor. You may imagine the excitement of the group who hammered on his door, and their relief to hear his voice within saying—

“I am all right,—wait till I open the door,—there has been a robbery, I think.” An instant passed, the key turned in the lock, and the Frenchman, calm and unhurt, appeared on the threshold, holding a lamp and a revolver.

“I wish you to understand, Mr. Adrian,” he addressed my uncle, “that I acted wholly in self-defense.”

The men fell into the room. On the floor, near the window, lay the body of Balsamo, the chemist. In his pockets were various trifles, a gold cigarette-case, a ring, taken from the room adjoining. Near him on the floor was a revolver, of which a single charge had just exploded.

M. du Caylus told his story. He had been fatigued, and so gone up early to his room, and slipped on his dressing-gown, intending to read. But the May evening was mild, so instead he drew his chair near the window and sat in the darkness enjoying the perfumed air. He may have dozed, when he suddenly heard a slight noise of steps in the next room to which the door was open—saw a strange man enter silently, and move to the dressing table. Du Caylus sitting in the darkness had remained perfectly still, until he realized that an attempted burglary was taking place. At his exclamation, the robber turned and fired the first shot. His position gave du Caylus an advantage, and he immediately retorted with a second and more effective bullet. The whole affair was so swift and startling that he had remained as if stunned, until he heard the others clamoring outside his door.

My uncle caused the body to be examined. A letter from his wife demanding money, and some bills to a rather large amount, and the cover of a note-book with the pages missing were all that could be found on it except the stolen articles. There was nothing to be done but hush the matter up as far as possible, and

notify his wife. The most significant incident of all developed when they attempted to do so, for it was found that she had left her lodging, giving no address. Stories were afloat of lights burning that night in Balsamo's cottage, and a woman's shadow at its windows, but nothing more tangible; and later enquiries at the convent where the child had been, proved that the mother had been there and taken her away, leaving no trace.

"Of course, my uncle searched the cottage afterward?" I asked Cecil.

"To very little purpose, I believe. The stove contained a heap of ashes and fragments of burnt paper, among which there were various letter-headings from some of father's largest rivals in the trade. This made him certain that the man had been a double-dealer. And in the cellar were fine skins, and carboys of various substances recently bought, showing he had been really experimenting. But after that, father got disgusted and threw over the whole thing. Of course, the party was broken up, and I was glad enough to have father by himself, for his disappointment was bitter."

CHAPTER IV.

INVESTIGATIONS, AND THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE QUINCUNX

The slight air which had stirred about us as Cecil began to speak, had died out into the warm silence of a June mid-day. The kindly oak threw his heavy shade over us, and made purplish shadows under my cousin's eyes. I had followed her with close attention, and yet still felt in the apparently simple course of events the presence of a something unexplained and hidden.

"May I question you a little on one or two points?" I asked her. "There are some things here which I don't fully understand."

"Certainly you may," replied Cecil, and turned her gaze candidly upon me. I looked away, for I wanted to keep a clear head.

"Which room did Balsamo die in?"

"The one you have," was her prompt reply.

"Why then, did M. du Caylus claim he shot Balsamo at the dressing-table, and yet he was found dead near the window? There is the width of the room between them."

She looked puzzled an instant, then said slowly, "He may have been mistaken—or, could the dying man have staggered there?"

"Hardly. You did not see the body, I suppose?"

She shuddered. "Of course not—and it is not certain what was said. It is over three years ago."

"That's the trouble, it's so far back.—You are sure yourself that it *was* robbery?"

"Why, Philip, the things were found in his pockets! And in the talk with my father that day, you remember he said that he must have money."

I began to strip little pieces of bark from the tree and throw them away.

"Tell me about this M. du Caylus."

She colored, and her voice changed imperceptibly. "He was a friend of mine,—is anything more necessary?"

"Yes," I persisted, "when did you meet? How old was he?"

"We met in New York. He brought letters of introduction to my aunt, Mrs. Culver. He was thirty-five or forty."

"Unmarried?"

"Yes."

"And you liked him?"

"Immensely."

"Then why did you refuse him?"

She turned her flashing eyes on me. "How did you know?" she cried, and then witheringly, "How did you dare?"

"Please don't be angry," I begged, "I'm taking only an investigator's interest, nothing personal! I simply want to understand the position at that time,—that's all."

Cecil did not look convinced. "I don't see the connection. However, M. du Caylus had never been to the United States before. He was a remarkable man in many ways; most polished and cultivated. I simply did not care for him enough to marry him,—that's all. He *did* ask me, on the very next day before he left. The whole affair distressed him a good deal."

"Then we must eliminate M. du Caylus," I quietly rejoined. There was a pause, which Cecil broke in another tone.

"After all, there is no reason why I should not be frank with you, Philip. I've often wondered why I didn't care. But there seemed something underneath his wit and humor, and taste, and kindness and ability, which I felt, and didn't understand, and didn't like. I can't

point to any one thing,—it was just a girl's fancy."

"Or a woman's intuition?"

"Perhaps."

We were both silent. In the delight of her confidences and her friendliness, I was in danger of forgetting our lurid little problem.

"And your father gave up all search of any formula which Balsamo may have left?"

"He tried at first, but got no trace. Then he got angry, and said he had lost money enough."

I sighed, commiserating Uncle Adrian on his lack of my own valuable services.

"Suppose we look at those papers, now that I understand."

She put them into my hand. They were torn pages from an ordinary note-book or diary, closely filled with writing in a small foreign hand. Two sheets were torn across, but readable,—the third piece was merely a fragment. They were written in the most astonishing mixture of French and English, the two languages often dovetailing in the same sentence. The following is a translation:

"Feb. 12th.

At work all day. In town, saw Marianna.

From Vettori received \$137.52..... \$89.75 profit. Gave M. \$100.00. No news of Gellatly. Feb. 15th.

The Gellatly matter looks very dangerous. (l'affaire Gellatly a l'air bien dangereuse.) Vettori is anxious. Latest operation unlikely to succeed.

Feb. 16.

To Marianna \$50.00. A letter from my beloved little daughter. Vettori will go himself to investigate the Gellatly matter. No reply from Jones Brothers. Vettori says "Pazienza!" From Mr. Adrian \$250.00 for laboratory expenses. A good day's work notwithstanding my anxiety.

Feb. 21.

Vettori went to-day. Marianna had a headache, would not see me. Worked later on new batch of skins.

March 20.

Telegram from Vettori, tells of accident to Gellatly. Left at once; arrived Boston just in time. Vettori is much shocked, but also I can see a little relieved in mind. Gellatly speechless, but still living. Hurt in spine; one of the hazards of his profession! Died at 4 a. m. Vettori kindly made all arrangements,

and we two, with Chavaignac, followed the body to the grave. No family; no relatives to notify, —Pauvre cher vieux! Feel more relieved than for months past, however, and worked most of the night. Mr. Adrian grumbling about money, whereas his millions! His is not the only leather concern he will find.

Mar. 25.

To date—Marianna \$150.00 for my little one. From Mr. Adrian \$200— Vet. and Cha. \$439.19 —I wish it was as good each time."

This ended the two complete pages of what had been evidently the chemist's diary. The fragment that remained was smaller and so badly torn that only a part of the sentences remained. I was struck in examining it, by the appearance, no less than six times repeated, of a cluster of five dots arranged as on a playing card. I give this scrap as it stood.

*25.—Mai. Travaillais • ∴ • Il y à.....
Succès. Plusieurs notes • ∴ •
 N'est ce que.....21. Lettre de Jones
 Frères. Envoyé à Vettori. Il est d'avis qu'il
 faut finir par là.....27 Mai.
 Affaire finie. • ∴ • à Chavaignac.....
No. 3. • ∴ • à.....
 • ∴ • 2.....*

The paper was of poor quality, thin and old. On the other side, there was the remains of an address, half effaced, and in a different hand.

"Pierre Chavaignac, 27 Sous-le-fort St."

The rest was illegible. I turned this piece of paper over and over in an absorbed silence; by and by Cecil, evidently impatient, looked over my shoulder.

"Look at those little dots—what can they mean?" she asked. "See how often he repeats them!"

I thought of Goethe's journal, (I was always a worshiper of that great man), and the little zodiacal signs he employed to designate special people.

"I think it is a symbol for some person or thing," I told her. "Cecil, could you get the key to that cottage?"

"Easily enough," she answered surprised, "but there's nothing in it, I assure you, except some worthless furniture."

"These pages came from somewhere, and we might find more, who knows? I begin to be very much interested in this affair, and would like to investigate further."

"Do you mean you think there is a chance.....?"

"I don't mean anything yet. I want to look."

Our eyes encountered; she must have detected a spark of excitement in mine. For I am,—it is my bane and my blessing,—of that temperament, imaginative, concentrated, fiery, which carries on and convinces others before I am myself carried on and convinced. Cecil was a woman and did not ask me for facts, she simply lit her torch at my enthusiasm and swept along with me. At bottom my theories were but nebulous,—my brain busy spinning possibilities for being of use to my uncle in some unexpected way. And governing it all was a deeply literary interest in the story, and a thirst for further details. I've vowed to be truthful in this narrative, so you see on what an underpinning of straw was the fabric erected; and yet, understand this too, a more conventional, experienced man would have been less favored by events.

Cecil undertook to get the key from the gardener, and ten minutes later we stood in the front entry of the cottage. The change was great from the warm, clear sunshine, the life and growth without, to this dusky and ruinous decay, falling plaster making a gray dust, a

shivering damp rising from the floor and bringing a musty smell to our nostrils.

"Ugh," said Cecil, and raised her skirts with both hands. A charming pair of Colonial ties pirouetted in the patches of sunshine which had come in with us, but I did not even pause to admire them. The ghost of Sherlock Holmes held me in his grip.

I made Cecil name me the rooms. On our right was the parlor, absolutely empty, thick with dust and plaster which no footstep had disturbed. The same description applied to the other rooms on the first floor, kitchen, out-house and laboratory, though my cousin was evidently dissatisfied with the passing glance I gave them.

"I should have thought this the place to search," she suggested; "that's where father looked."

"Then surely there is no use in our doing so. And moreover, what I want to find out now is where that woman went this morning, and you can see for yourself it was not here."

"Oh!" said Cecil respectfully, and subsided. We came back to the front hall and inspected the stairs. Here were at last traces of passage, the touch of slight fingers on the dusty balus-

trade, and the swirl made by a skirt on the step.

"But look!" I cried in dismay, "could she have changed her mind and turned back? The mark of her skirt ends at the second step!"

"Because she held it up out of the dirt," remarked Cecil serenely. I drew a breath.

"Man was not born to live alone!" I ejaculated fervently. "Let's go up-stairs."

More finger-marks on the stair-rail guided us to the upper entry, where Cecil triumphantly pointed out to me a neat footprint. This I followed in turn to the doors of the only bedrooms in the cottage. The larger of these was filled with the contents of the laboratory, piled pell-mell upon the floor. The other articles were a large table without drawers, a bureau, whose drawers had been taken out and stood on end, and a rickety washstand. I went to the washstand, because the mysterious foot-print led straight to it; but the foot-print led away again and I found the wash-stand absolutely empty.

There remained the smaller of the two rooms, and nothing looked more unpromising. A couple of beds, taken down, stood against the wall; the mattresses were rolled up in a corner.

There was a broken chair, an old clock, and a small hanging cabinet of cheap make, suspended from a gas-fixture. The little door of this cabinet stood open, and merely to be thorough, I went across and shook it without any result. But I did not at once hang it up again. The wooden back was splintered and broken, but one of the screws which had been originally used to fasten to the wall still remained. The piece of twine which hung it upon the gas-jet was new and strong. I then replaced it, but I rather wondered why and from where it had been moved. We had finished examining this end of the house, and turned our attention to the little room over the wood-shed, known in New England often as the "cuddy" or "the cud."

However, I found this end of the cottage so ruinous and unsafe that I was obliged to send Cecil down-stairs to wait for me. She went reluctantly enough, and I hastened my survey to rejoin her. The "cud" was hardly larger than a closet. From a trap-door, a rotting ladder led down into the outhouse. There were shelves, and a press painted grey, whose doors stood open. The floor was covered with lumps of plaster, so that I had no longer the foot-prints to guide me.

I was just turning away, when I saw, protruding above a gaping rent in the plaster, a screw, the fellow to that in the back of the little wooden cabinet; and I realized suddenly that here was where that cabinet had originally hung. I examined the place and found the whole wall surface bathed with moisture, from a leak in the gutter-pipe at the angle of the roof above. This then was the reason the cabinet had been taken down, and this had just come to me, when I noticed sticking to the screw a small fragment of pink stuff. I examined it eagerly,—it was a bit of thin dress goods significantly fresh, crisp, dry and new; my mind instantly recalled the pink-clad figure I had watched that morning and I became convinced that it *was* the cabinet for which she had been searching. But I had found that cabinet empty!

It must have been a flash of inspiration. Cecil was calling me. I was turning the pink shred in my fingers and recalling the whole thing,—the shattered back of the cabinet, the gap in the wall at my side.....and then I went and thrust my hand deep into the hole in the wall, and far down between the clap-boards my fingers met papers. I drew them up and

at a glance recognized more pages from the chemist's diary.

Cecil called again, but I was tearing the wall out in my excitement; and when I finally joined her, covered with mould and plaster, I had twenty pages or more of Balsamo's note-book.

"From what you told me," I said to her as we locked the door behind us, and stood again in the sunshine, "and what I saw, the thing is almost plain. Evidently she came for these pages of the diary, and went straight to the place where the cabinet used to hang. There she tore her sleeve on the screw. Then she went to the bed-rooms, found the cabinet where we found it, with one or two papers inside, which she took away. But she never thought to look for the rest where they had fallen into the hole in the wall."

"I think you are quite remarkable, Philip," said my cousin, and I was ready to agree.

"Very few women really understand the inductive method," I consoled her.

It was late, and we should have gone straight home, but could not forbear pausing to examine our prize.

And here I underwent mortification from too hasty conclusions. For I saw at a glance the

justness of my reasoning, and my own foolish triumph, which I ought to have carried a step further. The leak and the resulting dampness, which had been the last link in my chain, had undone me, and the pages which I had recovered were practically illegible.

CHAPTER V

A CHALLENGE FROM MY UNCLE

Never was a man more crest-fallen than I at this discovery, nor one more entitled, it would seem, to sympathy. And instead of consolation, Cecil gave me only peals of unkindly laughter.

"Oh, it's too delicious,—your expression!" she cried between laughs. "The foiled detective, the complete reasoner in one volume utterly refuted!"

"Was I so pedantic as *that*?" I asked, between my teeth.

"You had been lecturing at me a little, you know!" she remarked cruelly.

"I should have known they would be wet; it was the whole point. Why didn't you say something?"

"So few women understand the inductive method!"

I did not look at her; I knew her eyes were sparkling with the tint of the sun-lit ocean. I walked on furiously, with big strides; she kept

lightly beside me. As we neared the house gates, I took the bundle of papers and was just about to hurl them into the bushes when she restrained me.

"No, no," she cried more seriously, "don't do that, father may want to see them,—and besides, you don't know if some may be better than others.....And isn't it a good sign that I should tease you on such short acquaintance? One doesn't poke a friend's fire till he has known him seven years."

"I wish you were my friend," I retorted gloomily, stuffing the papers back into my pocket, and slackening my pace.

"But am I not,—a new friend at least?"

"I don't know,—friendship implies equality."

"Now you are childish," she said a little haughtily, but I was in the mood to be indiscreet.

"That is what your father thinks at any rate. Do you suppose he has asked me here except as a poor relation,—one who is not to presume on the invitation? Certainly that is the way I read his manner of this morning."

Cecil was silent for a moment. When she spoke, I was already repenting my ill-humor.

"My father is not at all well," she said, very quietly, "and pain makes him often rough and brusque in his speech. It means very little, and I thought you understood it. I am quite sure that you will find he treats you always as his kin, and a gentleman."

I met her eyes this time, and found them full of kindness.

"Thank you," I said in the same tone, and a flash of sympathy and understanding passed between us.

"Now," said Cecil gaily, "we will go and tell our great discoveries to Papa!"

I followed her, thinking I had never seen a face more sensitive, a gentler mouth, or deeper, sweeter eyes. We found Uncle Adrian sitting at his desk in the little study; a pipe in his hand, and blue clouds of smoke whirling around his head. He listened in silence to Cecil's lively account of our doings, but when she handed him the papers, flung them impatiently on the table.

"How did you come to find these papers?" he asked presently.

Cecil answered: "Philip reasoned out where they must be, though the mysterious lady of this morning failed to find them."

Uncle Adrian blew out a fresh curl of smoke.

"And he thinks," Cecil went on eagerly, "that by carefully analyzing these papers we may find some clue to what Balsamo really did."

"Philip has an ardent imagination!" sneered my uncle.

"At least it is worth trying" I ventured.

"What is worth trying?" he interrupted. "I have spent my last cent on that d . . . d foreign rascal and cheat, I can tell you that! I believe he deceived me from the first and never made any experiments at all. Patent leather indeed! He knew as much about patent leather processes as he did about bacteriology!"

"But the laboratory, sir, the materials?"

"All a blind, to help him in sticking me. Oh, I was milked," cried Uncle Adrian furiously, "regularly, like a cow."

"But, Uncle, then why did he correspond with Jones Brothers?"

"How do you know he did? Those letter-heads I found prove nothing."

"True," I said pointedly, "but in one of those papers which you don't think is worth while to look at, he says he had a letter from them." I handed him the scrap, and he condescended to look at it.

"I can't make head nor tail of the stuff," he grumbled, "and it's all d....d fantastic nonsense anyhow."

"Well, I don't agree with you," said I, and felt sulky at being balked by the old man. Here Cecil, however, broke in.

"But Papa," said she, and leaned forward her face full of earnestness, "just suppose Balsamo had made some discovery, it belongs to you, and"

"If he had," her father cut her short, "some other firm would be advertising and using the process after three years. Don't be silly, Cecil! What do you know about it? If the formula had been good, it would be in use by now, and don't you suppose I've been watching the trade ever since to see?"

I began to see there was more than pigheadedness to Uncle Adrian's position, but instead of daunting, this roused me. At bottom, I suppose I was determined my discoveries and theories should be acknowledged as worth something by this unyielding business man.

"But that might be explained," I observed.

"O, yes," he rejoined with raised eyebrows, "it only needs literary talents like yours!"

He had a gift of saying disagreeable things

which I have never seen equalled; but this time I was not angry. In truth, I seemed to catch, in his persistent rudeness a note of deliberate effort to test my self-control, so I simply went on firmly: "At all events, we have not taken into account that the woman I saw this morning went in for *something*,—therefore, that others are in search besides ourselves."

"Then I suggest," the truculent voice retorted, "that one of you competent young people might have tried to find out who this person was,—if it was anyone."

His eye deliberately searched me while he spoke. Cecil's face flamed, but I was not even annoyed. After all it was not so bad a method of testing a young man's mettle, though a rough one.

"I was about to propose doing so with your permission, sir."

"Well," he said, "we will talk of it again after you have done so. Cecil, do you know that you are keeping me waiting for dinner?"

Cecil apologized and fled. As for me, I also left the study, followed into the hall by a long unmistakable chuckle of satisfaction from Mr. Adrian's corner. At that sound I lost all my fear of him.

With my partial interest stimulated into something very like determination, I made careful enquiries at the village concerning the passengers who had been driven to Balsamo's cottage the day after my arrival. The information was meagre and left us as much in the dark as before. The ladies had apparently been driven over from the little mountain resort, Monadnock, six miles from Ashuelot, where they had been staying in the hotel for a week past. The boy driver told me of two sisters, one in the deepest mourning. They had been in the habit of taking long drives, had claimed to have explored the ruined cottage with a friend the day before, and while there to have dropped an important letter. The younger of the two had asked for the key at old Jackson's cottage, and gone to hunt for the letter, but they had come away disappointed,—“crying too, for I heard her, all the way home,” the boy said. They had left the hotel the next day by the Boston train,—I found this out when I rode over there, and also saw the register. The names “Miss Smith, Miss Jones, Newburyport,” furnished me with very little information. Old Jackson, the gardener, was however positive that no other visit had been made

to Balsamo's cottage, and that nothing had been said to him of a lost letter. As the place was nominally for rent, he had no excuse for refusing the key.

These were the only facts obtainable. When I attempted cross-examination as to details of dress and personal appearance, I became hopelessly befogged by the New England mind. Both ladies had been veiled, the one in mourning heavily so; the other was presented to me as blond and brunette, as tall, thin,—but not real thin, just a mite fleshy, and as dressed in blue, pink, white and green.

The incident certainly, however, did not minimize the whole affair, and I opened the subject to Uncle Adrian with more confidence.

"Surely, sir," I cried, "you must acknowledge there is something odd about the situation. This man writes of 'success,' and the 'affair finished' yet nothing has happened. After three years some one searches his cottage! Suppose there is a formula."

"It belongs to me," said Uncle Adrian, and shut his mouth. We were sitting by the study fire after dinner. Cecil at the piano in the next room was singing softly to herself.

"And there is so much in the story of the

chemist's death, which in my mind is not properly accounted for. Why was this French gentleman, a guest in your house, armed with a revolver, on the night of the dance?"

"Because he was a Frenchman," said my uncle as if that settled it. There was a pause and he said gruffly, but not rudely, as he had done at the first interview:

"Don't you realize, Philip, that we speculated just this way at the time? The affair was fishy, of course,—the man was a charlatan. I was done by him, and that's enough for me. I don't believe there ever was a formula."

"In the face of that paper, sir!" I cried, rising. Uncle Adrian suddenly lost his patience.

"The mutilated copy of a lunatic's ravings!" he burst out. "I challenge you, you young fool, to make anything out of it! There are the papers in my desk,—take them and work out your theory if you like; but I challenge you, mind, to produce anything that a sensible man would listen to!"

"That remains to be seen," I said, and rose for Cecil's voice called to me from the drawing-room, "Come, Philip, and sing 'The Roses of Yester Year' for me."

I went in and stood by the piano. The room

was dusky, for the June evening was too warm for lights, but to my eyes there was a pale gleam from her coils of hair. She did not look up at me, but went on playing.

"He is going to let me try and convince him," I whispered, "do you think I can?"

"There are times when you are very convincing," said Cecil.

"He thinks me fantastic and wild," I said, pleading to her, "but I believe so firmly in the formula,—the internal evidence is so strong!"

"He wants to think so," replied Cecil softly.

"Ah, but he has no confidence in me!"

"He will have if you succeed in this."

"Suppose the formula exists, and I should find it?"

"He would give you anything you asked." She was barely touching the keys, so her words came plainly to me. I laughed softly.

"Suppose there is nothing he can give," I said, "in comparison....."

"He's grunting and getting impatient," said she hurriedly striking some louder chords.

"Don't you think you had better begin?"

"You sang that better yesterday," she remarked when we had finished.

"I am going to try," I told her, keeping my

voice low as I bent over her. "It seems the only way that offers,—a queer fantastic one but still—what he thinks of me doesn't matter, if you....."

"The words of it are very pretty," she interrupted, "and certainly I do, Philip; aren't you a sort of cousin?"

"Let's have something rousing and cheerful this time!" called Uncle Adrian from the next room.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRANTING OF THE QUEST

In order to make perfectly clear the results of my analysis of Balsamo's diary, it becomes necessary for the reader to know something, briefly, of my method of procedure. The whole business occupied five or six evenings. I began by counting and numbering the pages themselves. There were twenty-six, including fragments, written on both in pencil and ink, much soiled, creased, rubbed and damaged in every possible way. These pages I took one at a time, gave them a superficial cleansing, and subjected them to the closest possible study with the aid of a good microscope. When sentences, single words, or even parts of words could be deciphered, I copied them on sheets of foolscap under separate headings,—trying always to get them into the proper order of time. I then made a list of the people mentioned in the diary, and thus placed some of the fragmentary sentences in their right relations. I was helped a little by the fact that the entries were usually very brief,

and invariably dated, the dates covering the space of two years.

So much for my system. The results were alas! seemingly not worthy of so much care. When all was done, the scraps we had picked up in the road remained the most significant, the twenty odd pages I had found in the cottage furnished me with very little additional information. The decipherable portions proved to be records of expenditure or experiments, mention of his wife and child, casual notes upon other names, and the constant recurrence, in the latter pages of the diary, of the little five-spot, or quincunx symbol. The garbled and misspelled French in which the entries were written was a great bar to clearness, particularly when it ran, without warning, into strangely constructed English, interspersed with Italian phrases and proverbs. In this I could not have proceeded, without Cecil's help.

When all was copied out and grouped, I sat down to consider the material at hand. The personages mentioned in the diary were the following:

1. Marianna (his wife).
2. His daughter (called always 'petite' or some other diminutive, but never by name).

3. Alessandro (often shortened to Sandro) Vettori, evidently a very influential friend or near relative.

4. Anthony Gellatly, (both of these first names were furnished by the body of the diary) a friend who died violently and mysteriously in Boston, two months before Balsamo's own death.

5. Pierre Chavaignac, whose address was given, all but the town, which after much thought I decided must be Quebec. There might be a 'Sous-le-fort Street, in any French town, to be sure, but these people were all in America, and I thought the Canadian city more probable.

The five-dot symbol, which I will hereafter call the quincunx, gave me a great deal of trouble. It could not be a person, for the use of it in phrases like "worked · ∴ ·" seemed to point rather to Balsamo's experiments. At the same time, it was often jotted down seemingly at random in the middle of a sentence, or used almost like a qualificative to a phrase, such as "· ∴ · 1 à Chavaig....." and no. 3 "· ∴ · à....." and even "· ∴ · 2", which I found repeated in some of the earlier pages. Also what was one to make of "Plusieurs notes

• ∴ • ” which suggested almost an abstraction? The consideration of this important symbol was to be approached, I felt sure, only through the light thrown upon it by the rest of the material.

Along its main lines, the diary bore out what I already knew. Constant need of money was expressed in every word; the chemist's wife was rarely mentioned except as asking or receiving it. There was no allusion to Mr. Adrian, save in the parts I have already set down,—chiefly in the, to me, immensely significant remark of his ‘not being the only leather concern, etc., as he will find.’ The child was always tenderly spoken of. Gellatly's appearance and end has been already copied, but the mention of Vettori often abbreviated to “V” ran through all the pages,—that tantalizing “V” frequently meeting my eye, the only legible mark in a paragraph.

Passing to the subject of Balsamo's accounts we came face to face with some important facts. He makes scrupulous mention of sums received from Mr. Adrian and from Vettori, and thus places before us the curious truth that these latter were so much the larger and more important. In fact, at the time he was representing himself to Mr. Adrian as penniless,

he was noting in his diary the receipt of sums double in amount those he asked of his employer. Under March 25 for instance, he gets \$200 from his patron, and \$439.19 from the influential Vettori! So it runs through the diary, and according to that record of expenses, Balsamo must when he died have been worth some \$3000 or \$4000! And yet he died a thief.—What had become of that money?

This was my first point. The second was made from the remarks about the Jones Leather Co.—Vettori's advice to conclude an arrangement with them, and the words "*affaire finie*"—translated by me as 'matter settled.' It only remained to call attention to the word "success," with which he ended a sentence on that 25th day of May, just a week before his shameful death.

Before giving the summing-up which I laid before Uncle Adrian, I repeat my own doubts and queries on the subject of the death-scene. Personally, I was very far from being satisfied with the account I had received. I still wished an explanation of why Uncle Adrian's guest went armed in his house; indeed I would have doubted his whole story had I not myself found the bullet embedded in the wood-work of the

room. With this matter, however, we had not at present to do, so I omitted all treatment of it when I laid before Uncle Adrian, the account which I had prepared. It sets forth all the above points, and ends with the following conclusions:

a—That there is no suggestion of failure, internal or external in the diary, but always the cheerful note of success, and once the use of that word itself.

b—That unquestionably, Balsamo was treating with Mr. Adrian's largest rivals in the trade and that his friends knew of the existence and value of his discovery.

c—Therefore, that all evidence pointed to a successful formula in existence or which had existed, and also known to these people, one of whose addresses is furnished us.

d—That some outside event or complication of which we know nothing, precipitated Balsamo's tragic death and lost us his formula. This may have been stolen, or only hidden by the chemist, or possibly was never written down, but its existence once, and its value at that time, seems to be proved by the effort made to find his diary by the two unknown young women.

And, finally, that the quincunx symbol being the only symbol in the diary, is therefore the most important fact in it; that whether it stands for the process itself, or for some substance used in the process, or some place where Balsamo worked in secret; or, merely verbal, as the indication of a cipher in the body of the manuscript, it serves to conceal the facts, and is therefore the one point to be aimed at in my interview with the people mentioned in the diary, should we ever run across them. Following my conclusions, I suggested to my uncle that the address of Pierre Chavaignac gave us a possible, though dubious clue, through which we ought to reach one or other of the persons in question. Personally, I added, whether he moved in the matter or not, I was absolutely convinced that Balsamo's discovery existed, and was being held back from us for some reason unknown.

It was with much excitement, and a touch of trepidation, that I waited for Uncle Adrian to comment on the above document. He did not seem in any hurry to do so, however, and I might have speculated upon the fact of his silence if I had not been more absorbingly employed. Need I say I had come to dread any

chance that might disturb the present, or make a change in the direction of that current which swept me so powerfully along? It is easy to decide that I was a presumptuous young dog, and should have paused, and qualified, and reflected after the modern fashion.

But we were practically alone together, she and I, in that great house on the hill-top, whose windows looked out always upon purple and golden hillsides,—much as my thoughts looked out upon a distant and beautiful future. We walked together, through green woods and valleys, climbed cliff-tops together, rode together through miles of deserted wood-trails, read or sung together in the evenings. If it had been yourself, good reader, who had Cecil beside you in the woods, the sun and shade dappling her white gown, the mystery of forest stillness in her face; or if you had ridden beside her in exhilaration of early morning, seen her hair glow in the sun, and the joy in her eyes as she swept up the hill in a gallop; or if she had read to you, in her flexible voice, or listened to you with dilating pupils, while you spoke of your ambitions, would you have come forth unscathed? I had never cared before; and Cecil's face possessed that inscrutability and

elusive quality, which deepens the mystery for a young man. She had come to open the door of her reserve to me, once or twice, and in the space I had caught glimpses of such richness and glow,—of such splendid color of emotion, of such ‘barbaric pearl and gold’—was it a wonder I grew dazzled?

It was a fortnight tense with exquisite possibilities of happiness; and once when her horse stumbled, and I thought for an instant he had thrown her, of exquisite possibilities of pain as well.

“What is the matter?” she called gaily, as I came up. “You look as white as a sheet.”

“I thought for a moment you were thrown.”

She made some playful denial, and we rode on together in silence. My gravity evidently puzzled her, for presently she said:

“I hope that stumble did not trouble you, Philip. I am not often so careless. It had no real significance.”

“That is what I am wondering,” I replied.

“You think I cannot be trusted any longer.”

“I was not thinking so of *you*.”

“You are slandering poor Bourbon!” she laughed, and patted her horse, and I did not answer. The incident had awakened me. I

had lost power of letting myself drift in the joy of the present moment;—I must face the truth now and take up my man's burden of anxiety and responsibility. I was no longer sure of myself, and any moment might precipitate a crisis in which I should lose my head. The only safety so far as I could see lay in immediate flight.

That same evening my uncle called me into his study. I went gladly, prepared to tell him that I must terminate my visit; and, oddly enough, was almost disappointed when I saw he held the papers in the Balsamo matter in his hand. He opened the conversation in his abrupt manner.

"I wanted to tell you," he remarked, "that I've been reading this over, and I don't think you are so much of a fool as I thought you at first."

At this handsome concession, I bowed.

"You seem to have a neat way of putting it, anyhow," my uncle went on, pushing on a pair of spectacles and glaring at me through them. "Not that I think it's anything at all practical, stillthe truth is, Phil, I always thought that Balsamo a d....d clever rascal!"

"I agree with you," said I.

Uncle Adrian shifted in his chair and cleared his throat.

"Undoubtedly, you have got a certain grip on the business," he continued grudgingly, "so I suppose you've ideas as to doing something about it?"

I saw caution and flattery both, in his face, and I decided that sheer assurance was my best game.

"Oh as to that," I replied airily, "of course, I know what *I* would do in the same place, and it's natural I should have a plan; but of course, the affair is no business of mine."

"You mean," my uncle tapped the table, "that you would advise me to go and hunt up this what's-his-name, in Quebec?"

"*You*," I cried scornfully, "my dear Uncle, by no means; the mere name of Adrian would send the chap flying to the ends of the earth, if he is there to fly."

"It's easy to change a name, I should think."

"You take too good a photograph for the illustrated papers," I said. He was silent.

"Let us put our cards on the table," he said finally. "Why should you not undertake it for me?"

"That depends," I answered, "on what there is in it for myself."

"I'd pay your expenses, of course."

"Thanks, but I can't afford a holiday."

There was another pause. My attitude, be it understood, was far from being natural; *that* course would have been to offer myself unreservedly to my uncle, without a question of money. But my object was to make him respect me, which he would never have done had I followed my temperament,—literary instinct told me that.

"Perhaps you don't quite realize the situation," I said, leaning back and speaking crisply. "Already there have been two violent deaths in this matter. There were several people in it, and the gang was certainly not the most law-abiding. They'll expect money. I'll have to pay it. I may have to travel about in search of them, and perhaps take all summer, and fail in the end. You know how I am placed. I must make a start in the world, and have no time to lose. I thought that was your idea in asking me here."

"You are not so much like your father as I thought," he vouchsafed.

"That is a pity," I replied, having progressed since the first day.

"Your mother was a good little woman,"

was his next remark. "I remember her well."

"She is waiting in New York," I said, "for me to turn to and stop being an idler."

"You wouldn't expect the same amount if you failed, of course?"

"I'd expect to be paid for my time," said I, as bluntly as himself.

"I shouldn't wonder if you might be of some use in the works after all," mused my uncle, shuffling the papers.

"Let's put it this way," said I, sitting back coolly, although my heart was thumping. "I'll undertake to run up there, and spend the rest of the summer hunting the formula. You pay my expenses, including what's needed to buy the thing if it exists, and a salary, of, say, the same you'd give me if I were starting as a clerk in the works, I suppose about ten dollars a week. If by November first, I have no clue and no chance, I'll give it up and turn in to whatever work you like. But if I find the formula."

"Well?" said Uncle Adrian.

"You will sign an agreement giving me a royalty on the sale of its product, and a check for five thousand dollars."

"The devil I will!" My uncle bounded on his chair.

"Those are my terms," I concluded, "and very moderate they are. If you get the thing, and it's no use, you're only out five thousand, a mere trifle. If it is valuable, well, you can afford the royalty."

"You are " my uncle spluttered and choked back the epithet; while I waited, standing, in an attitude of respectful resolve.

"You will start to-morrow?" he got out at last.

"To-night, if you like." I said affably, "It's merely a question of a Notary Public and a check."

"You young " began he, turning purple; and then, to my great relief, burst into a roar of laughter, and repeated my last words as though they had been an excellent joke, "A Notary Public and a check indeed! You impertinent young scamp!"

BOOK TWO

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF AN
ALIAS

CHAPTER VII

I AM CALLED GELLATLY

The echoes of his laughter followed me as I went out, wiping my brow. It was a warm summer night, and hardly a breath stirred the trees. My mind was in a tangle of joy and determination, and triumph, and doubt, and dread—seeing my opportunity, but knowing it visionary; daring the future but fearing it; resolving on success, yet feeling it likely to be determined by the merest whim of chance. I walked out upon the porch, and saw Cecil's white dress there, so drew near and sat down, trembling.

"I've got my chance," I breathed to her.

"I am very glad," she answered in the same tone. I could not see her in the dusk, but it seemed to me that a tense note like a thrill of music ran along her voice.

"Of course," I went on, arguing with myself, "I know it is a wild-goose chase, at best, three years too late, a lot of fishy foreigners to hunt up, and like as not, no formula when I find them; but no! that I deny! and I won't go back on my convictions. Do you hear, Cecil? *There is a formula.* I believe there is, and it is only a question of me, *me*,—and what I can do, and how much tact and energy and ingenuity I can use to find it!"

"You have all of them," said the voice with the music in it.

"Do you believe in it, too?" I asked her. "I should feel so much stronger if I thought so."

"I believe in it, and you," she answered.

"The devil of it is, it means so much," I said after a pause. "I'm to go into the works as a clerk, if I fail,—and why should I pretend to you, that I like that? But there is my little mother, waiting so faithfully, so trustingly, just as she waited all my father's life time for the time of pinching and worry to be over. I must end that for her, somehow."

"I know I should love her," said Cecil.

"Whereas, if I can put this through, it means, oh, a great deal besides money,—Uncle

Adrian's confidence in me, and liking for me, perhaps....."

"He has that already," Cecil interjected softly.

".....and a chance at a kind of work I should like and could do. And then,—then," I had caught the shining of her eyes, not so far from me, and it made me perfectly reckless. "Don't—don't think I don't realize the position! A poor devil getting work from his rich uncle, I know, but there are rights that belong to every man, and I'm not overstepping mine now. I meant to go away this afternoon, when Bourbon stumbled, and I saw that—that I couldn't answer for myself any longer. But to-night has made a difference; I've a chance in life, a pretty slim one, and fantastic, but if I can pull it through, I shan't feel ashamed, I shan't hesitate!"

She had turned her eyes from me as I hurried on, speaking barely above a whisper. It was so still that the broken sound of my own voice struck me. The hem of her dress just touched me, and her hand which lay along it, moved with her breathing; while we both looked out upon the garden and the clear stars.

"I'm going very early to-morrow," I said,

“so I shall say good-bye now. Will you wish me good luck? I don’t know how it will all end—I feel like one of those old chaps in Mal-lory, going off on a quest. . . . I only know one thing, that if I do succeed,—I shall want to see you before I tell your father.”

Her hand moved until it reached mine.

“And if you don’t find it?” she said.

“I must find it!” I cried, and I bent down to her hand and kissed it. The touch of it seemed to break everything down.

“Oh Cecil,” I said, “Cecil!” and my voice, I know, rang with feeling, “Go away from me quickly, because I’m not so strong as I thought!”

The most exquisite moment in my life, was that in which I felt her hesitate. But just then, some one opened a door within, and a flood of lamplight gilded the piazza-floor; so I heard her murmur ‘good-bye’ and then she moved swiftly away and left me alone in the caress of the darkness. My head spun and my heart sang, but the night was kind to me as she is to all young lovers, she quieted me with her stillness and her touch; and when I came in I was quite ready to talk business with Uncle Adrian.

I did not see Cecil again that night, and when

I saw her in the morning, she was just my reserved, cousinly hostess, thoughtful and kind. My uncle had his Notary from the works, and we signed our agreement along the lines which I had laid down. Then he gave me money in green-backs, and wrung my hand with actually a touch of bluff cordiality, and I got into the carryall and was driven off to catch the train. I had an odd sensation of being in a dream, so fantastic did my errand seem to me, and so hard it was to take it all seriously, after the greater reality of Cecil's glance. That glance, and the touch of that hand,—those remembrances filled my mind for the first three hours of my journey to the total exclusion of Balsamo and his affairs, but after that, I made resolutions and strove to think of them no more. After all, I had a campaign to plan, and had better set about it.

Often since that time, I have wondered how much of my enthusiasm on the subject of the formula was due to a mere young combativeness and desire to make an impression; certainly at the beginning I hardly expected to be taken at my word. But now, after poring upon it for so long, the fantastic story had come to have a reality and a value, and I had become to feel

convictions. It was true what commonsense whispered, that after a lapse of three years, any evidence on the point of such a discovery was likely to be destroyed or unattainable; yet at bottom, I held to the hope aroused by the salient features of the story, namely, that the causes of the tragedy were too remarkable or important, to be easily obliterated. It was no ordinary train of circumstances, I was confident, which led the chemist to such a crime, and to such a death; it was no slight tie, I suspected, which bound him to the men whose names he mentioned; although how extraordinary the circumstances, how singular the relation, I was very far from guessing. These things were in my favor, and it was through the true history of Balsamo and his friends that I meant to force my way to the formula, if formula there were.

The night express from Portland brought me to the station at Point Levis early in the morning, and I stepped on the platform, tasting with refreshment the cooler airs of Canada. As I stood waiting for the ferry, I noted the panorama of the St. Lawrence spread before me,—the beak of the cliff crowned with the irregular bastions of the Citadel; the town

huddled about its foot, and the yellowish walls of a beautiful and picturesque building thrown prominently forward upon this grey-blue background. The stage-setting, I felt, was perfect, and I smiled somewhat whimsically to myself as I thought of the possible *dramatis-personæ*. At that same instant there first came to me the truth that I, myself, possessed the disadvantage I had been so quick to point out to my uncle; for was not my name Adrian as well as his? Evidently, I must change it for the time of my stay in Canada, and it was none too soon, either, to make the proper preparations. I had no time to consider or reflect. I took the first name that came into my head which naturally enough was that of Anthony Gellatly of the diary. During my hurried mental search, I remembered that the man bearing this name was dead, and that he had left no family, no friends, so there seemed no reason against his lending it to me. He, poor devil, was all over and done with, I thought in my giddiness, forgetful of the words of his namesake, and a greater Antony.

To clinch the matter, I sent a telegram then and there to my mother telling her how and where to address me; and I missed a ferry-boat

while mutilating and defacing my suit-case with a knife; my trunk had no initials, which was satisfactory. When, an hour later, a young man of smiling aspect, and a dancing eye approached the sovereign ruler of the Château Frontenac for accommodations, he wrote in the register with dash and confidence the signature 'Anthony Gellatly, Boston.' So I took the first step on the curious road of my experience,—so, noiselessly, without a tinkle, the curtain rose upon the anticipated drama, and never I knew whether it was to be 'tragic-comical' or 'historical-pastoral.'

I was given a room overlooking Dufferin Terrace and the river, where, after breakfast, I spent some hours unpacking and writing letters. Then armed with the address, I set forth in search of the necessary and mysterious Pierre Chavaignac.

A calèche-driver seized me, and I consented to take his jinriksha-like vehicle, not without misgivings. Although noon in late June, the air was deliciously fresh and invigorating; the aspect of the streets had much naïve picturesqueness. Quebec is a town where two peoples meet without assimilation, and each, therefore, preserves much of its original color and char-

acter. Here the scarlet clad British soldier dominates the street side by side with his twin over-lord, the Roman Catholic Church; here the bells of innumerable convents and churches jangle on the air with those of an English war-ship anchored in the harbor below. True, the streets have lost the Indian and the voyageur, but they retain the habitant and the soldier, the green-sashed seminary boys, and the religious, male and female, of every habit. Tiny irregular patches of garden, miniature bastion and rampart, winding streets and terraces looking down upon bright tiled roofs,—all this brought to my mind those toy fortresses sold to military-minded small boys, and filled with stiff little figures in primary colors. Old-fashioned, it is, as we Americans know it, yet with none of the elder melancholy, the quiet mellow age of European towns, for Quebec still keeps a touch of bristling readiness; an outpost in the wilderness of northern forest.

My way led down Fabrique street and under the crumbling, unsafe cliff, into a tortuous alley where the second stories of the houses almost met. Here at the indicated house, I knocked. An elderly woman opened the door and regarded me with distrust. I have a fair

amount of French, but the patois is another matter, and I found it hard to understand. The name of Chavaignac, however, seemed entirely unknown to her, and the only interest aroused by a liberal fee, led to the appearance of her husband who had lounged in the background. He, however, had some English, and when he had grasped the nature of my enquiries, he was quite willing to tell me the little he knew. He had only occupied the house for eighteen months. Before then it had been used as a lodging-house, but the widow who kept it had done very well, sold out, and retired to a little farm on the Beauport road, or over by Rivière du Loup. Another small tip did procure me the widow's name and exact address, and the promise of a liberal reward in money for any information about the man I was looking for, seemed to arouse something very like enthusiasm.

"There must surely be men about who had lodged here in the Veuve Ladou's time, who would remember Chavaignac,—and as Monsieur was willing to pay....."

Upon this theme he escorted me to the calèche, (I could see the driver's estimation of me visibly falling) and I set forth, back to the

hotel, not encouraged, but not daunted either; and willing to believe that something might result in a day or two. Waiting, however, was a test I dreaded. I knew it would depress me, so I resolved to put in the time with explorations and expeditions which might fill my note-book. On my way to the hotel, I saw several bits of building and street corners which tempted me, so I waited only to eat a hasty luncheon and then out again to take advantage of the light. I was in my room making ready, when a card was brought me. I asked the boy if there was not some mistake, but he seemed surprised at the idea, assuring me that the gentleman had asked very positively for Mr. Gellatly, and that he was now waiting in the round parlor.

Still stupidly enough, I turned the card over in my hand. It bore the inscription:—

“M. le Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord,” and in the corner, “Maison de l’Orme, Quebec.”

“And who,” said I to myself in astonishment, “in the name of all that is wonderful, is M. le Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord? I never heard the name in all my life.”

It seems incredible that I should not, until

then, have remembered my alias, and the errors into which it was likely to lead me, but when I did, it was of course to bid the boy take me to the gentleman at once. My mind hardly occupied itself with the incident, so confident was I of closing it after a few words. When I reached the parlor which fills the large round tower of the Frontenac, it was empty save for a tall man who stood with his back to the window. This threw his face into shadow, but showed clear against the panes the outlines of a figure erect, soldierly and trim, with square, well-balanced head, and hands folded over his cane.

The boy disappeared. I advanced, prepared in a few courteous phrases to dismiss my mistaken caller. The gentleman had turned, and stood, evidently uncertain, awaiting my approach. Something—I know not what—in the poise, so still, so attentive, the head bent forward to me; something,—I know not what—in the eye which dilated upon my face with a very intensity of penetration, these trifles served to check my careless purpose of dismissal. And one step further changed my indifference into watchful curiosity, for I heard the man draw a sudden deep breath, whether more of surprise or relief, it would be hard to say.

"Am I addressing M. de Pétry de Chambord?" said I, glancing at the card. The gentleman bowed.

"Are you Mr. Gellatly?"

"That is my name."

"Mr. Anthony Gellatly, I believe?"

This time I bowed assent. The manner of M. de Pétry was perfectly easy and direct; the voice of M. de Pétry was pleasant in timbre, deep and commanding. I began to feel uncomfortably like a cad with my false name.

"I once had the pleasure," he continued, taking a chair near at hand, "when I lived in Boston, of becoming quite intimate with a family named Gellatly on Dartmouth street. I am much in their debt, in fact, for many kindnesses. So, when I saw your name upon the register this morning, I looked for my young friend of that family. Pardon me, if I have been mistaken."

It is hard to say what holds a man silent on occasion. Here was evidently a gentleman; here was an explanation, simple, fluent, probable, and yet for some unexplained reason, I was not convinced; convinced I mean, to the point of confession. My feeling simply led me to accept the situation, and to go on as it directed. So I replied immediately:

"I am delighted to meet you! I suppose you refer to my relatives?"

M. le Colonel's smile was open and charming.

"Then you are connected? What a happy chance for me! I hope you left my friends well?"

"Very well, thank you. And what the deuce," I thought, "is the man driving at?" There fell a short pause, during which I studied my visitor; a man of forty-five, active in habits, powerful in build, and whose head was covered with hair slightly gray. His features were handsome, strong and bronzed; the mouth, hidden under an iron-gray moustache, was quick to smile; the eyes were dark blue, steady and penetrating. Here showed breeding, and better than that, force. I was disposed to accept the chance of so desirable an acquaintance, one which might be of practical assistance.

"Do you stay long in Quebec?" was his next remark.

"I hardly know—" said I, hesitating.

"I am an old resident," said the Colonel, "but the place has not outgrown its charm for me. You must let me be your cicerone," (I noticed he pronounced the word correctly)

"and show you some picturesque bits. I see you sketch." (how did he see that?) "So much the better,—if you are fond of history as well as architecture, why, I can promise you a fruitful stay."

"I beg your pardon," I asked, "but how did you know? It is quite true, but I carry my sketch-book in an inside pocket."

He laughed. "But your box of drawing-pencils in an outside one."

"You are most observant, M. de Pétry. I wish I could accept your suggestion. But my stay depends upon my business."

"And that, of course, is an unknown quantity?"

"More or less." I was still somewhat puzzled, but I began to like the man. "There is no secret about it," I went on, "and indeed, I should be only too glad of a little help from anyone who knows Quebec."

"Any relative of my good friends...." the Colonel bowed and I bowed; he listened to me with the greatest attention and I proceeded:

"I'm looking for a man who was in Quebec three years ago. The name is Pierre Chavaignac, and I have his address at that time, though I failed to find him there. Can you suggest anything?"

There was a moment's pause, during which M. de Pétry reflectively bit his moustache and looked out of the window.

"Chavaignac," he repeated. "The name is quite unfamiliar to me, but it is doubtless common in Canada. I will make enquiries; the priests of that parish, for instance, might furnish a clue. The Church, Mr. Gellatly, keeps a close account of her flock."

"I am infinitely obliged," said I, "for I must find this man."

Then fell another pause. "Are you the son of Mr. John Gellatly?" asked my visitor abruptly.

"No. My father's name was Philip," I replied at once, and then recollecting myself, I suppose I flushed, for I caught his eye on me.

"You would not have known it," I hurried on in explanation and quite truthfully, "for my father died under painful circumstances, several years since."

"Ah!" replied the Colonel sympathetically, and rose to take his departure. I thanked him for his call and his interest; he reiterated his offers of service, and so we parted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAISON DE L'ORME

The only letter which the next morning's mail brought me was written in an unknown hand and bore the postmark of Quebec. Opening it I read as follows:—

MAISON DE L'ORME,
THURSDAY

DEAR MR. GELLATLY:—

It will give my daughter and myself great pleasure if you will dine with us most informally this evening at seven. The driver of any calèche will know where to find us. I am in hopes of being able to serve you, and in any case am anxious for your further acquaintance. Believe me, very sincerely,

H. DE PÉTRY DE CHAMBORD

Here then was the problem. I had blamed myself, after the conversation with this cordial Canadian, for my constraint and my squeamishness, in the matter of my alias. Surely, I was Mr. Adrian's employee, and on his business, and if this false name was

necessary, it was no further concern of mine. Yet now, face to face with this rather tempting opportunity to lessen the tedium of my lonely evenings, I felt again troubled by the fact and disinclined to accept. I might have declined, had it been wholly a question of my own pleasure; I would have declined, but that I still bore the vivid remembrance of the Colonel's eye as it first met mine; of the attentive head; of the suddenly relieved breath laboring in a gasp. Trifles these, yet they puzzled me; the fact of friends with whom he identified me did not seem wholly to account for them. Gellatly too, was a name whose connections I could hardly afford to ignore. I resolved to go, and perhaps because I was going, I sent the message of acceptance in a thrill of excitement which lingered with me all the day.

The hours passed rapidly; I could do nothing further directly in my search for Chavaignac, so I spent them sketching or dreaming on the terrace, or wandering on the grass-grown ramparts of the Citadel in the sole company of the regimental cow. She somewhat resented my appearance on the breastworks, and put her head down at me, but with the fort ditch between us, I was safer than most enemies. I

explored by-streets, alleys and short-cuts; (Heavens! it was fortunate I did!) investigated Parloir Street, and the back of the Ursuline Convent; studied the lower town, but scorned the more modern portions beyond St. Louis Gate.

I found on enquiring that Colonel de Pétry's house was nearly three miles out of the town on the Cap Rouge road. The night was cloudy and warm with a heavy sultriness. The grey clouds swept down the St. Lawrence and hung low over the houses, bringing with them a thin, penetrating mist. My calèche whirled through the dusty streets at what seemed to me a perilous pace; the driver, seated almost on the tail of the horse, urged him forward with ejaculations. We turned corners, sped through dark ways until my sense of direction was wholly confused, and when we finally came out upon the more open country, the mist hid all landmarks from my view. Here our speed if possible, increased; we jolted, shook, twisted, like a ship in a sea, the fog blowing in my face, the ineffectual lanterns making odd, bobbing shadows on the roadside. We went on and on; I was beginning to wonder if I were going to be late for dinner when the driver made a sharp

turn to the left between high stone gate-posts into the deep shadows of an avenue.

A moment later the horse was hauled suddenly upon his haunches and we came to a dead stop in the darkness of the road. I looked out expecting to see a house, but thick bushes were impenetrable on either hand, and I saw that the cause of our stoppage was a man holding a lighted lantern in his hand, and conversing in rapid patois with my driver.

“What’s the matter? What are we stopping for?” I called a little angrily, for my watch said seven o’clock.

Both men turned to me and poured forth an eager, respectful, wholly unintelligible flood of explanation; the man on the road advanced nearer to the calèche and thrust his lantern under the hood so that its light fell upon me. I had a momentary glimpse of a young, foreign-looking, evil face, of sharp white teeth under a black moustache and of dark eyes scrutinizing me with the utmost attention. Annoyed and surprised, I was on the point of protest, when he stepped back with a grunt, lowered the lantern and retreated into the shadows whence he had come. We plunged forward at once, and in an instant drew up before the lighted doorway of a house.

The incident passed immediately from my mind as Colonel de Pétry himself stepped forward into the hall to greet me. Seen under the lamplight and in evening dress his manner served to deepen the favorable impression I had received, and put me at once at my ease. Wringing me warmly by the hand, he called to a butler who stood in the hall to relieve me of my coat. The man, with all the swiftness of a well-trained French servant, took my hat and coat to an inner hat rack. I cannot say what caused me to be conscious of his presence to a greater degree than I usually am of the domestics of my acquaintances. Perhaps the hold-up at the gate had roused me to a nervous alertness, a greater keenness of sight and feeling. I know that under ordinary circumstances I should never have glanced in the mirror opposite as this man took away my things; but I did so then, and it was with a start that I saw his face turned back over his shoulder as he went, the eyes fixed on myself with an expression of devouring interest and curiosity. There was something almost sinister in its concentration, and in the butler's little eyes, broad, flat, pale face, and white hair. It was the second time that eve-

ning that I had been subjected to this curious scrutiny, and I began to have an odd, uneasy sensation. However, there was no help for it now, I reflected, as I followed my host through a doorway on the left whence came the sound of women's voices.

A great, high-ceilinged drawing-room opened before me, so large that the three lamps made but a slight impression upon its shadows. I had seen too little of the house so far to tell if it were old or new; but this heavy carved marble mantel, and these gilded cornices must date at least from the French possession. The gilding was tarnished, the marble discolored, the woodwork cracked and worn, but the room retained its air of dignity, its effort for the stateliness of Paris in the wilderness. The furnishings, too, were old, and gained by it. The damask curtains had faded from fiery crimson to a soft, pale glow, which warm tint was repeated on the chairs and sofas, and mingled on the wreaths and medallions of the carpet, now worn and blended by time into the tones of an oriental rug. The room was spacious, stiff and bare; there was a piano, a table with a book or two; no pictures, no flowers, no ornaments; yet the architectural propor-

tions were so good that I, at least, felt no lack.

Colonel de Pétry preceded me over the bare space of carpet to the farther end of the room, where two young women were seated under a tall lamp. He presented me:

“My daughter Claire, Mr. Gellatly; my niece Mademoiselle Marguerite de Pétry.”

I drew up a chair, and under cover of his pleasant, inclusive manner, I had a chance while talking to take observations. Both these girls were about the same age and the same height; both were very dark. These points of likeness granted, with the general bearing and manner of wearing the hair, one was much more struck by the points of difference. Mademoiselle Claire, as I shall call the Colonel's daughter, was of that distinct style so rarely found outside of France, thin, slight and angular, but erect and graceful, with a pale complexion, and remarkably black, brilliant eyes. Her hair was black; her features, small and irregular, expressed vivacity and spirit, but by their very mobility impressed one with a nervous want of repose. Indeed, everything about Mademoiselle Claire lacked repose; her angles, her incessant, changing expressions, her gestures, her very dress over-elaborately trimmed, and the profusion of her rings.

On the other hand, her cousin, Mademoiselle Marguerite, had a rich, olive skin; red lips; heavy, regular features; and large, brown, mild eyes like those of an animal. The features never changed; her handsome face seemed like a sullen mask. She half-sat, half-lay back in her chair, rarely speaking, indolent and languid. She wore a plain, black dress, and there was not one ring upon her quiet, brown hands.

Dinner was announced by the white-haired butler before we had fairly broken the ice, and I passed from the drawing-room into a dining-room which opened, evidently, upon a sort of veranda and garden. Here we enjoyed an excellent meal, while the conversation was carried on almost wholly by my host and his daughter, and with every effort at cordiality.

"You have one of the French houses here, I see," said I, looking about me. "Is it a family place?"

"Oh no," replied M. de Pétry filling my glass. "I am a Frenchman of the French, and have been an inhabitant of Quebec only a few years. I rent this old place, and I've grown very fond of it. It has quite a history; it was attached at one time to the Seigneurie at Sillery, half-a-mile beyond."

"And no doubt it has seen storms enough in the past," I said. "Is not that a bullet-hole above the casement?"

"I fancy it is.—You are evidently fond of the picturesque, Mr. Gellatly. Do you write by any chance, as well as sketch?"

"I have tried my hand," I confessed, not ill-pleased at his penetration.

"I have often wondered myself," remarked Mademoiselle Claire, who spoke with much more accent than her father, "that more has not been done with this part of the world. In the old days, and even now, it is full of contrasts."

"Take, for instance," I supplemented her thought, "such an old-fashioned house as this, built originally, I suppose, half as a fort, doubtless more than once attacked, taken and re-taken; and perhaps with some violent family drama inside the walls—crimes, quarrels; who knows? Then to sink peacefully into a quiet and dignified preservation!"

I raised my eyes as I spoke, and, once again, for a longer instant, I met the steady and curious scrutiny of the butler who stood behind his master's chair and who bent upon my face that half-fearful, wholly sinister gaze. My host

must have seen that I was disconcerted, for following my eyes he turned sharply and spoke with roughness to the man.

"Dufour, what do you mean? You forget yourself!"

This came from him in rapid French, and the butler, much embarrassed, murmured an apology, bowed, and retreated. Mademoiselle Claire looked after him angrily. The other kept her indolent eyes upon her plate.

The Colonel took up the theme and was soon telling me in his delightful fashion incidents of old border warfare, or legends of Bigot of infamous memory. We had coffee in the drawing-room, and Mademoiselle Marguerite, when requested, sat down in her deliberate manner and played some fiery Spanish music with an abandon wholly contradicted by her face. I talked easily with Mademoiselle Claire, and my host was simple geniality itself. The time passed quickly. I had ordered the calèche to return at ten, and when that hour struck I arose.

"And you must really go?" said Colonel de Pétry, "Let me see if your man has come."

He rang, the butler appeared and received the order. In a moment word was brought back

that the man had not yet appeared. I was very willing to have ten minutes respite, but half an hour passed and there was no sign of my calèche. Colonel de Pétry went himself to enquire, and returned shaking his head.

"My dear sir, your fellow has evidently forgotten. Careless chaps, these drivers,—and it is pouring cats and dogs. You must stay with us."

"It is certainly odd," I cried, much annoyed. "The man promised to return, and besides I did not pay him." The Colonel and his daughter exchanged glances.

"Oh, they are very independent," he said. "But really, we shall be delighted to have you stay, shall we not, Claire?"

"Delighted!" repeated his daughter.

"But I cannot put you to the inconvenience," I protested, "I had rather walk."

"Walk, Mr. Gellatly, in that downpour!" exclaimed de Pétry in horror. And I could hear in truth, the steady pouring of the rain upon the windows.

"Besides," he resumed kindly, seeing me hesitate, "it is no inconvenience. There is a room always in readiness. We live so far out, you see, this sort of thing happens all the time.

Ah, if you knew how often I had stopped with your kind relatives in Boston!"

He was watching me but I did not wince. After all there was no harm in accepting this cordial hospitality, and, moreover, my interest in this family had been aroused. I did not feel at all sure of the long road homeward in the rain, so there was nothing for it but assent and thanks.

My host and Mademoiselle Claire together, left the room to make the necessary arrangements. Mademoiselle Marguerite, still seated at the piano, had taken no part in the discussion, but on being left alone with me, a certain light came into her eyes and she played some scraps of melody uncertainly.

"It is not so far to Quebec, Mr. Gellatly," she remarked suddenly, keeping her eyes on the keys, "and the road is not hard to find. Should you really have to return, I do not believe...."

The sentence was cut short by the hurried entrance of Claire, who called out as she came up, "Everything is ready, and I hope we shall be able to make you tolerably comfortable."

Her eyes rested on the other who kept on steadily playing. I myself wondered a little; why did this girl wish me not to stay? But it was ridiculous to take any notice of her speech,

in the face of a courtesy so unconstrained as Colonel de Pétry's, who entered at that moment to carry me off to the pleasant room prepared for me. Here, as downstairs, all was old-fashioned, comfortable and dignified. The butler attended to my needs and troubled me no more with his glances. I was very tired and must have fallen at once into a deep sleep.

Something in the middle of the night awoke me with a jerk. I sat up, listening with all my ears. The steady gush of rain rang on the veranda roof; the room was pitch dark; it must have been an hour or so after midnight. All was silent, and I had begun to fancy I must have dreamed, when again I heard it—the noise of a door shut to quietly within the house, while, an instant later, muffled steps crossed the veranda below my open window and were blotted out in the rain and the night.

I wondered who it was that left the Maison de l'Orme so late; and then wondered anew that I had so much to wonder at. Even then, I had a dim forecasting that when I set seriously to work to add up these incidents, there would be a sum total for me to reckon with, but I was disinclined to be kept awake. I turned over and dismissed all these considerations till the morning.

CHAPTER IX

SECOND APPEARANCE OF THE QUINCUNX

When I awoke the sunshine flooded my room. The boughs of the great elm which evidently gave the house its name drooped in silver and green before the windows, and far off down a sloping meadow the waters of the river raced and laughed. All this clear freshness and bright tangibility of my surroundings made my over-night thoughts appear fanciful and absurd. While dressing I read myself a lecture on my riotous imagination and compared myself, scornfully, to the heroine of 'Northanger Abbey.' What were the facts after all? I was a guest in the house of a very polite and hospitable gentleman, and surely if he had an eccentric servant or late visitors, it was no business of mine. Moreover, how could I be sure I had not dreamed? I must not get off my balance during my mission and fancy supplementary mysteries, or I was in danger of making myself ridiculous.

There was no one about in the upper floor, so

I started down to the drawing-room. At the turn of the stair-case I paused an instant looking down into the lower hall. Nobody has ever fully explained the mysteries of instinct; why our bodies act, at times, before our brains direct them; how we chance to pause; to remain silent or to hasten onward before we have actually become aware of the cause. I do not know why I came to a stand there, motionless, and looking down. The front door stood open, giving a glimpse of bright lawns and flower-beds, and the back of the postman as he went whistling down the drive. The hallway itself was large and airy and bare, and occupied only by the butler Dufour. He stood in plain view and absorbingly occupied in trying to open a letter without tearing it. The rest of the morning's mail stood by him on a tray. I watched him as he worked, silently, dexterously, in a sort of concentrated, furious haste, and saw him finally work loose the gummed flap and slip out the contents. It all took only an instant; his glance at the unfolded sheet, his quick ejaculation of disappointment, his hasty, but thorough examination of the other letters, shaking them, holding them to the light, and finally hiding the tampered letter in his pocket, his

disappearance into the inner room with the rest of the mail on a tray.

The sight aroused all my feelings of the night before in a wave; while suspicion radiating from this man as a centre, embraced all the inhabitants of the *Maison de l'Orme*. I went down stairs with every nerve alert.

The young ladies were alone at the breakfast table, Claire behind the coffee-pot, her cousin opposite; my host was no where to be seen. My experiences had had little effect upon my appetite, and I ate heartily while chatting with Claire; for Marguerite, her face still and scornful as the night before, spoke hardly at all. Presently the Colonel appeared, active and cheerful, bringing with him a sense of vigor and good-fellowship. He sat down beside me, asked how I had slept, and then while taking his coffee, ran on in good-humored, easy fashion about the little concerns of his house and garden. Again he renewed in me the sense of a forcible and pleasant personality, so that my perplexities took a new turn, meeting his direct, sympathetic manner. In his rough morning-suit, he looked a very young father for Mademoiselle Claire; his eye was clear, and had a touch of vivacity; his laugh was ready and his

observations bore him out to be a man of sense. I never heard sounder philosophy, or kindlier estimates of his fellow-man than from M. le Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord.

"I know it's the fashion to be pessimistic," he said to me as we sat together after breakfast smoking on the terrace, "and to sound the cry '*vanitas vanitatum*,' but to save my life I have never been able to do so. I have lived nearly double your years, Gellatly, and I say in all sincerity that I have found existence wholly worth while, man in the main honest and loyal, opportunities not lacking, and woman. . . ." he finished in a ripple of laughter, "always kind."

"Ah," said I sententiously, "there is everything in being born a Frenchman." ●

The Colonel nodded. "It is the truth, my friend. Personally, I feel I shall never understand you Americans. So cold, so complex, so fiery in pursuit of wealth, so careless of what it gives! So hard to stir—yet so heady when aroused! So indifferent to public, so intense over private wrongs—so witty, so humorous, and so lax in commercial and political principles—and in everything else so moral, so con-foundedly moral!"

These observations struck me, and being at no time wise in my own conceit, I promised myself to learn much from this tolerant analyst. Therefore I suggested that he had enjoyed unusual advantage as an institutor of comparisons. He nodded an acceptance:

“But if you men offer me a problem—your women!” He raised his eyebrows and comically spread his hands abroad, “But I beg their pardon—the *ladies*. What perverted mental development and fatal disregard of the *métier de femme*!”

He became so serious that I began to smile. “Have your wide experiences included them also?” I asked gaily. “If so, I wish you would enlighten a junior.”

“There was one American woman,” said he solemnly, “with whom I had a relation of the utmost beauty, and one only possible in this continent—your relative, Mrs. Gellatly, my dear sir. An extraordinary woman; such a combination of wit, tact, beauty and virtue in one personality! Would it have been possible to believe in her existence if one had not known her?”

Nature herself could not refrain a side-glance as he put this preposterous question. But

no! that frank, soldierly gaze had no guile, and my suspicion ended in making me uncomfortable. Yet I was glad when he dropped the personal and harked back lightly to the general reflections which had opened our talk.

“All I mean, my dear Gellatly, is that I have learned from experience to protest against in-differentism. It leads to cynicism.....and cynicism is merely the clever acknowledgment of failure. I am an old fellow, but I find life very good for which I have the highest authority.....and I ‘reverence the dreams of my youth.’ By-the-way that sentiment, do you know it? Strange to say it comes from a German—a people who have neither reverence nor dreams, nor youth—as we of Sedan know but too well!”

He sighed and his face clouded. I said to recall him from unpleasant recollections:—

“But my dear Colonel de Pétry, you may have been the fortunate youth. We are not all so.”

“No, no.....” he denied this as he knocked the cigar ash to the floor, “I had no unusual advantages save in the sympathy of my friends. I am impulsive by temperament, with strong likes and dislikes. When I take a fancy to a

man—I must let him know it. Yourself, now, you see how I talk to you! I often amused mes bons amis of Dartmouth Street by my expansiveness—so un-American, they said. Even Mrs. Gellatly herself would say to me—‘My dear Horace, you have no reserves—you are a child!’ and she was right as always.” He sighed, “What a woman! What a loss to your family!”

So she was dead it appears. I was not to meet on earth that improbable combination of excellences. At his tone of genuine regard, I hated myself for a cheap and tricky literary charlatan.

“You are sensitive beyond most of us, I think,” I ventured, to cover these feelings.

“I appreciate the good,” said he, “and I most fervently believe in human nature. It makes life so much easier for us all. You, my young friend, are still in your aspiring and unbridled youth. Take the assurance of a man twice your age and have faith in your fellow-man; and in other realities, sentiment, the consolations of a beneficent religion; in nature, the sublime and austere, and in Art and Poetry.”

I told myself here was an actual treasure and a valuable mentor. I longed to abase my-

self and make confession, and yet—and yet—I was wrestling with this disinclination, when his next speech gave me a cordial invitation to remain as his guest.

“And by-the-by, I have a sort of clue for you,” he went on, “which we will discuss later. But surely it would be far better for you to stay here if only in the interests of your search. Then you see what a quiet household we are: we will make no fuss over you, you will disarrange nobody. Will it not be more cheerful than the Frontenac?”

His manner was warmly cordial yet it would have availed little save for the circumstances which had aroused my curiosity. I wanted to understand this thing better, these people, these incidents; the discursive Colonel’s motive in allying me with supposititious Gellatlys of Boston, and asking me to stay—Marguerite’s motive in urging me *not* to stay.....the whole curious puzzle. This, and this only, made me willing to accept an invitation under the circumstances, but this was enough. I told him, however, that I hoped to find the man Chavaignac before very long and so get home. Where home was the Colonel did not ask.

“You will want to go back to the Frontenac,

of course," was his next remark, "to get your trunk, and as I have business in Quebec myself this morning I will order the cart at once."

I thanked him and he left me, walking rapidly down a path in the shrubbery where evidently the stables were concealed. A very humane man this must be, I reflected, who preferred taking a stranger in under his roof rather than have his horse out on a wet night; and I was not at all sure that if I had known he had horses the night before, I would not have insisted on driving back myself.

A door opened behind me while I was pursuing these thoughts, and Mademoiselle Marguerite appeared with a book and work-bag. I sprang up and placed a chair for her and she sat down a few feet from me bending over some delicate and fine embroidery; but not so attentive to her stitches that I was not conscious of her eyes upon me.

"So you have decided to stay a while with us," she remarked, not looking at me.

"Unless you object, Mademoiselle," I said, "It is very dull at the hotel, and your uncle has been kind enough to offer me aid in my search."

"For Chavaignac?" she said.

"Yes, for Chavaignac."

Marguerite held her work off to study the effect of a new shade of silk in the pause. I wondered if she were about to suggest dissent again, but she merely said: "You will find us almost as dull as the Frontenac, I fear."

"Not to me," I said with emphasis, and met for the first time her large eyes full on mine.

"Is this your first visit to Quebec, Mr. Gellatly?" she pursued again turning to her work. I nodded.

"How odd," she remarked, "as the Colonel says, when all your family know Canada so well!"

"My family, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, the Gellatlys of Boston."

Her remark was like the first drawing of a weapon, and I was conscious of the flash and prick of the blade as though it were tangible. I answered without hesitation, however,

"Not *all* of us, not my branch at least," and leant back idly in my chair to gaze out over the lawn and the river.

"They tell me American men are so chivalrous," was the seemingly inconsequent turn which she next gave to the conversation, "that women are so much more considered in the States. Do you think it true?"

"I rather think so, Mademoiselle."

"It is hard to test, is it not?" she went on more rapidly. "I have often wondered myself what a man would do if his chivalry were appealed to.....if he would give up any course, abandon a pursuit, or.....or....."

"Desert a duty?" I suggested, wondering more and more.

"If you choose to put it that way." Again her eyes met mine, her large, limpid eyes, like those of a kind animal, showing a certain entreaty in their depths.

"I am afraid that age is past," I replied lightly, and uncomfortably conscious, somehow, of her presence. I picked up the book she had laid upon the wicker table. It was a copy of Rousseau's *Emile* charmingly bound in morocco and gold, the design bearing an intricate monogram which I could not decipher.

"I read little English," said Marguerite as I opened the volume. "In fact we keep very closely our ties to France in this house. We all speak English, of coursewhy, what is the matter, Mr. Gellatly?"

"I fear I have torn a page," said I striving to hide my excitement. "Please forgive my carelessness. I did not realize the book was a legacy."

"It's no matter," said she coldly, and received the volume. She seemed annoyed, although the tear was a trifle, but I was too much agitated to trouble about her vexation. The book had opened to the yellowish title page, and you can imagine my amazement when I saw that page covered irregularly with little groups of dots—five dots grouped together; and at the top a date 'Paris, January 1880' in a small, foreign, handwriting, which many night's study had made as familiar to me as my own.

I had risen to make the speech about the legacy, and hand 'Emile' back to its owner, for I saw my host seated in an exercising cart, driving a spirited brown horse up the avenue. Marguerite must have seen him too, for she rose also, turning toward me a countenance from which the sullen mask had dropped, showing it full of mixed emotions, of entreaty, anger, pity, yes and fear, fear definite and unmistakable. I stood aside to let her pass me, and passing she spoke.

"You will go *now*; you will not stay!" The voice was choked and eager, and my mind was too great a turmoil to reflect on the importance of this appeal. I answered as lightly as I could.

"Ah, I have made up my mind to stay awhile!"

The mask dropped over her features again and picking up the book, she entered the house, just as Colonel de Pétry came smilingly toward me. I had no time at the moment to think about what had passed. Once seated beside my host, however, as we trotted rapidly down the highway toward the shining grey city which never got far out of the landscape, I let him run on without many responses.

Plainly, I could not now give up my chance of remaining at the Maison de l'Orme, not now when all the incidents were converging to a point, and when I had arrived, whether by accident or design, in the society of people to whom the name of Gellatly was not unconnected with the name of Balsamo. I knew the chemist's writing too well to err, but had I been in doubt, there was the very quincunx symbol itself. What light did this connection throw on the attitude of these people toward me, the man's scrutiny at the gate, the butler's scrutiny, the scrutiny of Marguerite? And what was to be my course? That most congenial to my temperament would be the frank avowal to Colonel de Pétry of my real name

and business, and sooner or later no doubt it would come to that. But meanwhile reason told me that I had better let things take their course for awhile, or until I knew these people better. There was too much unexplained for me to dare be open as yet, and the fact that I was on the track of Balsamo gave the unexplained a greater significance. I would be cool, wary and observant, until such time as I could safely ask my host's pardon for my concealment.

All this I decided as we went rapidly along, and then gave my attention more fully to what the Colonel was saying, for he had left the genial vein of philosophy in which he often indulged, and had begun the subject of my search.

"I told you I had a sort of clue," he was saying; "it is through the priest of that parish, who chances to be an estimable man. Ah, Gellatly, the hold of the Church is the one encouraging thing about this place.....but I suppose you are a heretic?"

"I suppose I am....." said I, "but what did your priest have to say?"

"I am immensely interested in such subjects and I wish your stay here might interest you

in Catholicism," pursued the kindly fellow. "You probably have never considered it,—however, that is for another time. I learned that although Chavaignac is far from a common name, there is record of such a man at that lodging-house three years ago."

"You did?" I said overjoyed. "Then you know where to find him?"

"Not quite, but I have hopes. The fellow had left for Les Eboulements to work at a lumber-mill there, but the priest has written him."

"My dear M. de Pétry I am infinitely obliged. Ought I to go there, or do you think the man will turn up?"

"Probably he will. . . . although," the Colonel added, "it depends somewhat on the nature of your errand. If he knows of it."

"He knows nothing of it."

"Or if it is unfriendly,—these fellows are suspicious, you know, quick and suspicious, and he may be up and off at the first word."

I considered as to how much I should tell him.

"It is not at all unfriendly," I said at length, "I need some information, some evidence, which he alone can give me, that is all. I am prepared

to pay for it, and pay well, for it is of great value to the people I represent."

"Ah," said the Colonel, "the Gellatlys of Dartmouth Street?"

I met his eye. "Precisely."

He whipped his horse. "Well, well," he said in an easy tone, "you are discreet, which is a rare quality in a young fellow. But I ought to give you some friendly advice in dealing with these people. You cannot be unsure, or take for granted. You must be very firm, and very certain of your rights, and your position, and your backing before you try to cross-examine them."

"I am not afraid," I rejoined laughing, "for my rights are certain, and I think my position and backing are proven by the course I am willing to take."

"Being the aggressor, you mean?" de Pétry suggested, his horse spinning through the St. Louis gate.

"The approacher, I should say," I replied.

"Ah, perhaps they do not guess that," he said. The plural did not escape me.

"I am perfectly willing for *them* to know," was my rejoinder, and we dropped the subject. De Pétry began to point out landmarks, and

meanwhile I was thinking, "The second warning—this grows interesting."

We drove into the court-yard of the hotel, and jumping down, I went in to get my letters before going to my room. Ten minutes later in the midst of my packing Colonel de Pétry found me.

"Can I get your mail for you?" said he.

"Thank you," I said, "I stopped for it a moment since."

"Suppose then, I leave your new address at the office," he persisted.

"If you will be so kind."

Somehow his tenacity brought to my mind the morning's incident of the butler and the letters. As I heard the Colonel's steps go down the corridor, I tore my mother's note and the other I had received into tiny scraps. Then and there, on the back of an old sheet of paper I scribbled her a hasty note, and one to Uncle Adrian.

"I think I'm on the track," I wrote the latter. "I'm going to stop with people who seem to know something, but I do not want them to know you are in it. So it's safer to send my letters to the general postoffice. I'm passing under another name, and my hopes are high,

but to be frank, the business gets more intricate every day, and I don't know how it's going to wind up."

Luckily I had stamped envelopes in my pocket, so by the time de Pétry had returned I had these letters ready for mailing.

At last my trunk was locked, and on my way out I easily slipped my notes into the post-box.

The drive home was spent in general talk, interspersed with anecdotes and jests. M. de Pétry seemed in the highest spirits and I was very well content, anticipating an interesting visit. Dinner and the evening passed off delightfully; the ladies sang and played, the Colonel and I sat up late, smoking and discussing religion and serious subjects, which he did with earnestness as striking in its way as his lighter touch. I went to bed entirely unconstrained and quite at home. Dimly, in the dark middle of the night, I seemed again to be aware of steps and voices, but this time they were only woven into my dreams.

CHAPTER X

KIND ATTENTIONS OF M. DE PÉTRY

My stay at the Maison de l'Orme began in this easy, tranquil fashion, bringing nothing definite to harass or to annoy me. The next three or four days were uneventful, and offered me no tête-à-tête with Marguerite, and no further suspicious occurrences. I awaited an answer to the priest's letter, and meanwhile, no one questioned me about my affairs, no one looked at me curiously; I was treated like a guest and a friend. I heard no more night sounds, and I grew able to pass the butler Dufour without that disagreeable consciousness of his notice. In fact, I would have forgotten everything, believed it all owing to my own nerves, let myself slip into perfect security, but for one little thing. There is always one little thing in such cases, because human nature is not infallible.

This particular slight fact did not dawn upon me until the end of the second day. By the third day it had grown to a suspicion, and by

the fourth to a positive certainty. It was no more, no less than this; *that I was never allowed to go outside the house alone.* When I came down from my room some one lingered upon the veranda; if I left the tennis-court to stroll in the garden, the Colonel invariably came out of his room to join me. If I expressed an intention of going to Quebec, he or his daughter drove me there. This surveillance was perfectly unobtrusive, it may have been no more than an excess of hospitality,—I thought it no more, until I began to test it with experiments. One afternoon, watching my chance I got to the bottom of the garden unobserved, when I heard a voice, and turning, beheld the butler running after me with a cardcase, which was not mine, in his hand.

“Monsieur dropped this?” he asked, hurrying up. I glanced at it and him. “No, it is not mine,” I replied and turned to go my way. But he kept beside me.

“It looks like rain. Shall I get Monsieur his umbrella?” he offered.

“No, thanks,” I said curtly and hurried on. The man persisted.

“If Monsieur is going to Quebec,” he suggested, always deferential, “I can order the horse in an instant.”

"Go back to the house," I said, "I want nothing," and as I saw him turn back slowly, I set off at a good pace. The voice of my host broke upon my ears.

"Ah, Gellatly, off for a walk? I feel like one myself. We'll go together."

I wheeled. There he was emerging from the shrubbery, a flower in his button-hole, his gait an idle saunter. But as he drew near I saw that he was breathing rather quickly; and I had an instant's mental picture of the master hastening down the side-path while the man kept me in parley at the gate. The idea was not pleasant.

"You have an extraordinary servant there" I remarked with strong traces of my feeling perceptible in my voice.

"Ah, poor Dufour.....he is an oddity, but faithful as a dog."

"He has a most unpleasant eye." I said impatiently.

"Has he been annoying you?" my host asked quickly.

"I found him officious, I confess," said I.

"I shall not allow him to be that," the Colonel firmly asserted, and we walked on, talking of other things.

This curious man had a store of anecdotes, each swinging upon a feminine pivot, and about which he managed to wreath the most fragrant and virtuous reflections. Personally, I thought the taste an odd one, but took it to be an idiosyncrasy. On this particular walk he strode along vigorously, snipping the weeds with his stick, and indulging in his usual comparisons and amazements on the subject of the American woman. The Colonel rolled off his tongue the qualities of his feminine acquaintances of other nationalities in something the manner of a virtuoso enumerating the objects of his cabinet—it was a point of view which I never could accept—although he called upon me for sympathy at every third sentence.

“As for courage, my dear Gellatly—they have it to an extraordinary degree, but it is an overrated virtue at best and entirely out of place in a woman. A woman too courageous for graceful surrender is a blot upon civilization. Sometimes it is a quality positively impudent. For instance—” here his military eye sparkled, “When I first landed there was a charming Americaine with whom I was most anxious to be *au mieux*. She did not seem unwilling, or so I flattered myself, and the game

was battledore and shuttlecock for some weeks, without much progress on my part. But one day, in her boudoir, I called up my whole battalion, and I was a perfect furnace of sighs, oaths, protestations, when the front-door bangs, and we hear Monsieur coming upstairs, from his office where I believe he practiced the stultifying profession of the law."

" 'Shall I get under the sofa?' I asked Madame.

" 'No, remain!' said she, and when Monsieur paused on the threshold, struck naturally by our agitation—do you know what she did? She took her husband by the arm, and she said—quietly, too, Gellatly!—'This man has been making love to me violently—I am glad you came in!'

" 'And did Monsieur challenge me, or knock me down? My dear sir, not at all! He was not even angry.'"

" 'He looks sufficiently foolish,' was his remark. 'I guess he had better go home.'"

M. de Pétry concluded this edifying anecdote with a good-humored laugh at his own expense, so that I suggested that at least he bore the recollection no grudge.

"Oh to a man of my temperament grievance

is impossible," he said cheerfully, striding along. "One should not refuse to go to the tables because Destiny keeps the bank; I ask only fair play, and I thank myself if my pockets are empty."

"I wish I could learn your invincible buoyancy and faith," I observed a little dryly.

"You should," he pursued eagerly, "It will help you to succeed in life. This world's casino furnishes admirable entertainment, my dear young friend, to any man of spirit possessing a cool head, daring, and un peu de philosophie mondaine.....As for the big words with which they try to frighten us—words like Ethics, and Responsibility, and Development!" he made a grimace, "fe fi fo fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!"

I laughed at his energy, and forgot to be annoyed any longer at the incident just past.

The Canadian summer had come at last, the days had turned balmy, and the fogs had vanished. The sun hung the white highways with veils of dust, and the distant hills blent in purple and blue with the sky. Even the nights had their edge taken off, and breathed so mild of July perfumes that at Mademoiselle Claire's suggestion we took our after dinner coffee on

the terrace under the stars. Dufour moved chairs and rugs out on the stone flags, and we four sat and chatted busily and humorously, like old friends—and not at all like the duellists we were, each with his eye on the button of the other's foil.

The moon slipped out of the trees late and filmy; her thin cold light showed in a silver streak upon the distant river. It was vague and faint, the moonlight of that night, without brilliancy, and I found myself remembering Shelley's 'dying lady, lean and pale.' I quoted the verse in an undertone; and Claire, with her shrill laughter, depreciated the beauty of English poetry. Give her Alfred de Musset or Hugo—said she with a shrug.

I was not in the mood for controversy, and so our talk died out. The Colonel puffed at his cigar. Marguerite, extended in a long chair, turned her meditative profile away from me. Claire moved restlessly, having no one to reply to her chatter. Her habitual unrest seemed that evening to be contagious, for I think we were all conscious of being nervous, of feeling a tenseness in the atmosphere. By and by, M. de Pétry arose,—felt he must write letters, he said, and so excused himself. A moment

later a card was brought out by the butler to Mademoiselle Claire. She read it, but seemed to hesitate,—and I caught myself wondering if it were at leaving her cousin and me alone together.

“Won’t you come, Marguerite?” she asked the other tepidly.

“If you like,” replied her cousin, listless as always, “but I have rather a headache.”

Claire still lingered. Through the open drawing-room window I could plainly see the visitor, a swaggering young man in the act of passing the time by looking at the few photographs on the mantel,—and there was one of Marguerite which he studied for some moments. Her cousin noted this and it seemed to turn the scale in his favor. She excused herself, mockingly, and disappeared through the long window which she closed behind her.

Marguerite and I remained in the silence and partial darkness of the terrace, side by side, in a complete pause for more than a minute. I had finished my cigar, and sat without moving, undergoing a sense of inevitable crisis, which a word would precipitate. Marguerite spoke first.

“Did you notice that?” she said with a touch

of sharp bitterness, "She knew she should not leave us, that *he* will be very angry, yet she is so vain she could not give up a visit, the more as she suspected it was intended for me!"

Her breast rose tumultuously, and her voice was almost fiery. I made no answer, having no interest in the personal rivalry of these two girls, and judging there was more to come. In this I was not mistaken, for seeing I did not reply, she sank her voice and hurried on:—

"I don't know what you will think of me, I don't care—" she said. "I've tried to make you understand, but you won't—you won't! I told them there was only one way to straighten it all out—and I myself must take it. I am so wretched, so miserable!" She caught her breath in something very like a sob. "I thought, perhaps, if you only knew how wretched I was, you would be willing to tell me."

"I will do what I can," I answered gently. "Tell you what, Mademoiselle?"

"All about it; why you came," she went on; not moving, not raising her voice, she charged these words with a passionate intensity.

"Can you not see,—don't you understand? They are half mad with suspicion and terror.

I do not know what they will do. And I—I am so sure they are mistaken, notwithstanding all, so sure you are not here for what they think; and every day I wake afraid for you, so afraid—that they.....”

The incoherent words rushed out. I could see her clasp her hands tight over her eyes, and fight for control. My easy pity was roused and yet I felt it must not lead me.

“What do they fear?” I asked.

She shook her head. “How can I tell that? I can only ask you. I beg you tell me, let me know the truth. What do you want with Chavagnac—you, of all people?” She took down her hands and with straining eyes, looked at me. “Do I not see by your eyes that you know?”

I remained silent. I was very much perplexed, but not at all afraid, only lost in a maze of conjecture; torn between the needs of my business and the strain of that moment. She leaned further over the chair toward me.

“My uncle will be out in a minute,” the intense whisper came. “It is a miracle we have had even this breathing space. There is only an instant more, one instant!....If you would only tell me!”

I was still silent. How could I speak without

telling my errand, and so probably, losing forever the last chance of fathoming the mystery of this household? For let me confess it, at that moment, had I known I could never find the missing formula I should hardly have cared, if only I might come to hold the key to this whole situation.

"I should never have spoken, never!" again the subdued passionate voice continued, "only I saw in your face, a something, something that gave me hope in my utter wretchedness. And then I could not bear it.....I have cried myself blind these nights, and tortured myself—Are you mad, or wholly reckless that you stay here? You, in search of Chavaignac, you knowing *his* handwriting when you saw it in that book,—you consent to remain in this house."

"I must stay....." I said, as quietly as I could.

"Oh the time goes, it is going!" she cried in an agony. "Tell me, I beg you!.....I will promise anything, for I have influence still; I will help you, I will get you out of this horrible place, no one shall hurt you, only tell me..... tell me....."

The words stammered and died on her tongue. A foot sounded on the terrace, and the Colonel's

tall figure turned the corner, and came towards us with a quickening step.

“Tête-à-tête in the moonlight, eh, my dear child?” he called playfully to the girl. “That’s right; youth and the moon have strong affinities. But must you leave us?”

Marguerite arose, swiftly and silently, and bade us good-night. I marvelled at the composure of her voice and face. She passed into the house, and the Colonel throwing himself into the chair she had left, indulged in a long and quiet fit of laughter.

“When one gets to forty year, my dear Gelatly,” he vouchsafed, seeing that I was at a loss to understand this inopportune merriment, “the interest of young people in these old worn-out situations, the moon, the terrace, the sex, the trace of tears upon the cushion of this chair,—seems really amusing!”

The man must have eyes like a cat, I thought, or a sense of touch like the blind. I found it hard to reply, but fortunately he did not expect it.

“Ah, but I should not laugh,” he resumed in his usual sympathetic voice, “for it is a marvellous night; the river touched here and there with silver, and old codger as I am, I hope I’m

not unappreciative of nature. Nature and poetry after all, Gellatly—*c'est tout*." He went on in his wonderfully trained voice to repeat one of Paul Verlaine's little lyrics, touched with mysticism and music, with an understanding of the subtle mood of the verse which I should never have expected. But my pleasure was not this time so great as to blot out all that had passed; and I felt disinclined for a literary discussion. So a long pause followed, and then the Colonel suddenly sat erect.

"By Jove, Gellatly, I had all but forgotten what I came out to tell you,—the Chavaignac man you want has been hunted out, and is coming down in a couple of days from the mountains to see you; at least so Father Antoine writes me tonight."

An hour before I should have been eager over this information, now it left me merely cool and cautious. And I saw his eye rest on me as I quietly thanked him and fell again into silence.

"I fear your talk with my niece was depressing," he began suddenly, in his kind voice, "poor, unhappy girl!" and he sighed.

"Mademoiselle has not very high spirits," I murmured.

“Who could have?” said the uncle pityingly. Ever since she came to us, Claire and I have done the best we could to cheer her up, but I fear her melancholy has gone too deep.”

“I take it there was something tragic?” I ventured. My host nodded.

“A very unfortunate experience, and to be plain, I fear it left permanent effects.” He tapped his forehead significantly—“A love-affair,” he explained. “Marguerite’s mother opposed it,—they separated, and the man died. Girls take these things so seriously; indeed, what wonder they do? Theirs is the cloistered and the introspective life, which we more active men are apt to forget. But really, lately, she has worried me greatly. Did you notice anything wild in her talk? It’s a delicate matter, Gellatly, but I feel that you are a friend and I may as well speak frankly; was there anything overstrained, any touch, you know, of those vague fears, and turning against her friends which are such definite symptoms of a certain nervous condition?”

Now Colonel de Pétry was a very clever man, and he worked up to this enquiry in a remarkably shrewd and careful manner, but when it came out he gave, unfortunately, that slight,

but significant over-accentuation which is the pitfall of all diplomatists. I understood his meaning perfectly; and I lied promptly and from the shoulder.

"I noticed nothing at all of the kind," I said; "a tendency to melancholy, if you like, a little over-sensibility. She did in truth speak of the death you mention, and I was very sorry to hear it."

"I shall have to take her to a specialist, I fear," said the Colonel. "What do you say to the smoking-room, Gellatly, it seems a little chilly on the terrace?"

CHAPTER XI

I GET MY LETTERS

The reader will not have forgotten the means I took at the outset of my visit, to prevent my letters from falling into the hands of the trustworthy Dufour. I had not repented my course as the days drew on, nor did I fail to be relieved each morning at breakfast when the mail was brought in, and Colonel de Pétry would say, half-gay, half questioning:—"And none for you, Gellatly! You are forgotten at home, mon ami!"

That there were letters, however, I was sure, and I determined to make an effort to get them, for perhaps Cecil herself had written. This was an idea which spurred one to effort, so the seventh night of my residence at the Maison de l'Orme, I laid my plans.

A sortie under cover of the darkness would be the natural idea, but I could not rid myself of the remembrance of those nocturnal steps and movements. Dawn therefore, seemed to promise better, and I forced myself to wake a

little after three, dressed noiselessly, and slipped to the lower floor. The house was absolutely still; outside, the grey was turning to silver and the river mists were beginning to rise, to spread their mauve and pinkish wings to the dawning like a flock of great birds which had brooded on the water all night. This the window showed me, and it seemed, for twenty minutes or so, likely that I should get no other view, for the lower floor of the *Maison de l'Orme* turned out to be barred and locked like a penitentiary. My giddy hopes of a key left sticking in some door vanished, as I noted iron bars, heavy iron shutters, chain bolts, and no sign of a key.

I wandered forlornly from room to room, feeling like the prisoner I suppose I was, till I reached M. de Pétry's smoking-room, which opened on the veranda. I knew this little place and its furnishings well—the big desk, locked as I found, (when I tried for a possible door-key) the tall walnut cabinets, locked also; the leather chairs, the book-case, also locked, but showing through its glass doors a heterogeneous collection of volumes consisting of lively French and Italian fiction, books on antiquities and mineralogy, and a copy of the

United States Tariff Laws. All these I knew, for I had left that room with my host at midnight. What was entirely unexpected and strange was the aspect of the floor,—covered with straw, cotton batting and splinters which had certainly not been there when M. de Pétry turned out the light at bed-time. Plainly, some one had been here since, and taken in conjunction with the steps on the veranda, it seemed probable at least that they had come from outside; if so, how had they got in?

Surely the way they got in I might get out, was my thought, and I studied the windows and doors with vigilance. The heavily-shuttered windows were impossible to open noiselessly, as no one knew better than I, who had been regularly awakened every morning by the process. At first sight the door seemed equally hopeless, with its array of bolts and bars. But when my investigation took me closer, I saw that these same bolts and bars had all been carefully oiled, and that made me curious. Then suddenly, I understood. A thin circular panel of wood had not quite slipped into place under the largest bolt. I moved it aside revealing a hole quite big enough to admit a man's arm, and permit him

to replace bars and chains from the other side. And better than this, when I thrust my own hand through, it caught something in the wood, and there was a key slipped into the crack. The whole device was neat and simple, and except on the closest examination, practically invisible.

Five minutes later I stood in the open air. Yes, the floor of the iron veranda was marked with muddy foot-prints, one set leading in, another out, and what was even more significant were the broom and water-bucket set aside for a swift obliteration of those traces. Truly, dawn was none too early to get ahead of the inhabitants of the *Maison de l'Orme*!

The veranda, joining the terrace, stretched across the river-front of the house. I set out briskly across the lawn, thinking to skirt round to the high-way at a safe distance from the windows. The dawn was brightening, clear and fair, and the dancing water ran along the bank with a pleasant ripple. I went down the lawn, past the tool-house and stable hidden in the alder-bushes, and then I turned out upon the lane that ran to the river. Just here, walking quietly along up from the river's edge, I met a pedestrian, who took me by surprise. An

elderly man plainly dressed, he passed me with a sharp glance which I tried to assure myself was chiefly due to my imagination. The encounter made me hesitate and walk a few paces further toward the water. It was all deserted and peaceful in the early glow. The roofs of Sillery shone a half-a-mile beyond. A little boat-slip ran out into the water, and fastened to it was a graceful, well-built steam-launch. In golden letters on her stern was the name 'Nénuphar,' and indeed, she rode the water like a very flower. Charming, innocent, she appeared, a gentleman's pleasure-boat; yet as the last link in a chain-locked house—occupants evidently concealing something, midnight steps, jewellers' cotton, copies of the U. S. Tariff Laws, the river St. Lawrence, and finally the swift steam-launch, Nénuphar,—was not one driven to damning inferences?

Surely I had plentiful matter for reflection during my brisk walk to Quebec and back. Suppose this were the explanation, suppose the inhabitants of the Maison de l'Orme were merely engaged in United States commerce, omitting the formalities of the Custom-house,—how did that explain their attitude toward *me*? Did they think me an American Secret Service man,

and if so, why seek me out, take me into the house, and proceed on their nefarious operations under my very nose? There was no reason in it. Marguerite's deadly earnestness, her tears, her passionate warnings, they too rang in my ears; yet, that touch of wildness, of incoherence in them, had not her Uncle explained it, and was he not after all the more convincing of the two? Where could I put my hand on anything out of the way in his behavior?

Then the pedestrian I had just met, at so unusual an hour,—this started a new train of thought. How much personal risk did I run, if the smuggling hypothesis were true? Suppose the police were on the watch—an arrest meant the end of my search, ignominious and final. These reflections unpleasant and menacing as they were, suggested no solution, save that I had no time to lose, and that I was glad my interview with Chavaignac was to be soon. I found my letters at the post-office, read them at once, and used them—(yes, even Cecil's, though I hated to do it) as cigarette lighters all the way home. It was just a quarter to nine as I turned in at the gate of the Maison de l'Orme, and cannonaded into a man, running at top-speed.

It was Dufour.

"Monsieur has come back?" he gasped out, and stared at me.

"Why certainly!" I replied, and I made a point to look him insolently in the eye, "I was only out for a stroll. Where is M. de Pétry?"

"They are all at breakfast waiting for Monsieur."

His hurry, his amazement had left him. I could not but admire the sudden withdrawal into the subservient butler,—even the flush of running left his face and it was again, with its wide smile, and little eyes, that ineffably sly flat sinister face I knew. He followed me quietly, and respectfully into the house.

I have always wished I had paused to catch some of the argument which was in progress rather heatedly in the dining-room. My entrance, of course, produced silence; and Claire from her place behind the coffee cups, bade me a cheerful good-morning. I noticed that Marguerite was absent, and that my host had been pacing the room.

"I hope," said I, "I've not delayed breakfast. I have had an enchanting stroll."

"We were beginning to be troubled," said the Colonel, and not a shade of annoyance tinged

the courtesy of his voice. "There have been rough characters about, and some of them are not courteous to strangers. How far did you go?"

"Only to Quebec," I said, "I thought there might be some letters for me at the General Post-office. But I saw no suspicious characters."

"I'm very glad," said the Colonel and changed the subject. I took advantage of a pause to enquire for Mademoiselle Marguerite.

"She has a wretched headache," Claire assured me; "you will have to fall back upon me as a *pis-aller*." And she fluttered her eye-lids at me in a way to cause my indifference toward her to deepen to dislike.

We finished breakfast. The Colonel excused himself, and was soon briskly writing in his little study. Of course, Claire remained faithfully by me, but in the intervals of her vivacious sallies I could see she shared the preoccupation which seemed to pervade the house. Even Dufour showed it, and I met him coming out of his master's presence with a sullen, hangdog air. Marguerite did not appear, and I began to wonder if she were being purposely removed, so to speak, from contact with myself?

The morning was long and tedious, and I found myself becoming nervously keyed up. Marguerite did not join us at lunch, and her uncle told me she was confined to her room. M. de Pétry did not seem inclined to give me his company, and a growing distaste for more hours of his daughter's, made me plead letters to write and so escape to my room.

As I passed through the upper hall, the door of the room next mine opened and the figure of a nun appeared on the threshold, in the dull black-and-white of her robes. Our gaze met. There was something not unfamiliar about the face in the close, harsh setting of its white coif; in the oval chin, full mouth, weak nose, large sad eyes. The sister bowed, I bowed. She glided down the corridor, and I entered my room. It was the warmest day we had had, and I welcomed the cool shadows within. I turned the key in the lock (how quickly one acquires the little habits of suspicion!) and threw myself into a chair near the window. There was a tension of impending crisis in the atmosphere, and I could no longer leave my plan of conduct to chance or impulse. These people knew now that I knew on what terms I remained in their house, and whatever their motive had been, it

might not be strong enough to keep me. In an hour I might be politely dismissed, and so say farewell to my quest. Or, and this was even less pleasant, there might be a visit of the police, and arrests, in which I could not fail, if only temporarily, to be included. I must act, and act quickly, yet how?

I put my elbows on the sill, and leaned my head on my hands. It was four o'clock and a light breeze began to rustle the elm-leaves, and even breathed upon my aching head. I thrust the shutters wider apart to meet it, and then I had that unmistakable consciousness of hidden eyes watching me. A chill passed over me and I turned my head.

Two windows away was the room in which Marguerite indulged her headache, and from behind those shutters I caught a glimpse of black-and-white robes, of large, intent, melancholy eyes. We stared steadily at one another, she behind the bars. Somehow, this partly-seen, this silent, lurking watcher, imbued me with the idea of something shadowy and menacing, at the same time that dim memories rose in my mind and, formless, groped about for words.

The eyes vanished; and my heart which had

stood still quivering, started off like a frightened horse. Certainly, I thought impatiently, another week in this house, and my nerves will be in rags. There was a slight creak, the shutter moved, a pair of hands large and white, thrust forward in the sunshine a twist of paper attached to a string. They remained, holding it toward me, quite within my reach.

Of course, the intention was plain; and I immediately leaned down and picked up the string. The hands waited, folded upon the sill. I struggled vainly with those indefinite memories, which seemed to show me the same pair of hands, large and white and strong, once before thrust into the sunshine holding a paper—only, in my recollection they seemed to tear it across and across, in an intensity which gave the self-same impression of menace, of danger, of fatality.

My fingers shook as I unfolded the paper. It was written in pencil on a page torn out of a novel.

“I am an utterly wretched girl,” it ran, “and there seems no hope for me, unless you help me. Before the Mother of God, I swear solemnly that this is no trap, and that I am in real danger. They are going to take me away

because I warned you. Then it will be your turn. If you are really he they fear, do not remain an instant in this house. Your life is merely a question of hour to hour. If you know anything of my father, however, you will know that I am innocent of any evil, and you will help me." It was signed "Marguerite Balsamo."

So excited was I at this instant that even the name did not amaze me. I was prepared for anything. But my feelings crystallized at once into a resolution when I read it. I did not under-estimate the risks which, through telling the truth, this generous girl was running, and I must not be less generous. I did not pause, but scribbled upon the other side of the paper:

"My name is Philip Adrian, and I promise to help you all I can. If you are the daughter of Balsamo, the chemist, you may be able to tell me what I have come here to find out. I am not afraid for myself and should they take you away I will go after you and set you free. I promise this, but you must in turn promise not to tell these people what I have told you. If you agree, burn this at once."

I retied the string and threw it out of the window. It fell across the window-catch and

was drawn into the room. I sat there anxiously listening, but no sound reached me. By and by, however, I smelled smoke, and saw a thin, blue curl of it float out upon the air.

CHAPTER XII

I RECEIVE AN AMBASSADOR

"I hope," said I to my host at breakfast the next morning, "we shall see Mademoiselle Marguerite downstairs to-day."

He turned the sheet of his newspaper, and shook his head.

"I fear not. She was no better when I saw her this morning."

The dining-room door opened as he spoke and admitted Claire, her elaborate vivaciousness clouded with something very like ill-humor.

"Is dear Marguerite coming down?" her father asked in his kind way. The girl replied with a shrug, "Not she! More obstinacy than illness, I call it!"

"You are hardly in a gracious mood, Claire!" remarked the Colonel, raising his eyebrows; but even this mild reproof seemed to tax his daughter's self-control.

"All very well!" she cried shrilly gesticulating, "and of course *I* am not to be considered, *I* am not to speak—*I* have no influence. You

mark my words, it is all sheer pigheadedness, and if you ever intend to use firm measures with the idiot, I say you are leaving them too long!"

"My dear Claire!" M. de Pétry turned an offended frown upon his daughter and went on more coldly than I had ever heard him. "I do not know what you mean! You strangely forget yourself!—Your unhappy cousin is at liberty to remain in her room so long as she chooses, of course. I shall certainly take no 'measures' save those of tenderness. Your accusation, Claire, hurts me, it hurts me more than I can say!"

"You know what I mean," said she sullenly, dropping her eyes.

"I confess I do not," said the Colonel, still stiffly, and evidently upset by the incident, he turned and left the room. Mademoiselle Claire made a little grimace as much as to say, "Foolish old Papa!" and took her seat quite at her ease. I thought to myself that the strain between these two girls gave the dullest of men a chance, and I proceeded to devote myself, with all gallantry to Mademoiselle Claire.

"It must be so hard for you," I suggested, as we talked, "to have for companion a person like your cousin, who is, let us say, a trifle exigeante and depressing....."

My sympathy, as I had hoped, unloosed her tongue.

"No one knows what it is!" she asseverated; "just because it suits Papa's plans to keep her—I have to stand all her whims and ill-humors! She must always be *first*—all attentions must be to *her*, or else the sulks, a headache! I am tired of it!"

"I don't wonder," said I; "it is apt to be the way with the less attractive of two companions, as no doubt she feels, Mademoiselle!"

Gratified vanity sparkled in her eyes, and then she dropped them. "Oh, but one does not like to think it is that."

"But what else could it be?" I conjectured.

"Monsieur is so sympathetic," Mademoiselle Claire sighed.

"And you have daily to look forward to such unhappy scenes!"

"Not indefinitely!" she protested, her little face set again into triumph and hatred—"This is probably the last time I shall stand her whims I assure you. Even Papa's patience has about given out, and I really think there will be measures taken with Mademoiselle la Martyre! When I think of her, and how she came. . . ."

She checked herself, noting perhaps the

eagerness in my face. That unhappy woman in the closed room upstairs.....I wondered how she had fallen into these hands, if she were in truth the daughter of Balsamo. What an extraordinary business from first to last!

I felt certain that Marguerite would make another attempt to communicate with me during the day; and several times therefore I showed myself at my window. I was not mistaken, although it was again afternoon when the twist of paper on a string was flung out for me. This time the words were very few.

"I am locked in here, and therefore cannot talk to you, but I will send a messenger to whom you can speak freely. Be in the shrubbery at the back of the old tool-house at half-past eleven to-night."

The note was unsigned. My reluctance, I confess, at the hour and the errand was great; yet I trusted the girl and knew I must not fail her. After all, she was more likely to help me than Chavaignac, and she seemed to feel that I could help her—of which I was doubtful. Night made the Maison de l'Orme an uncertain prowling ground; for the first time I realized that my work demanded at least the safe-guard of a weapon, and to marvel at foolhardy forget-

fulness in not having got one before now. I saw little of my hosts—they seemed willing to let me sit alone in the drawing-room under pretense of reading. Undoubtedly the situation between us was growing constrained; I even fancied at times that they no longer troubled to keep on the mask of hospitality, yet this was but my fancy after all.

I did not even try to sleep before the hour set for my rendezvous, and at twenty minutes past eleven, dressed in my darkest clothes I slid out by the arranged door into the darkness. The night was warm and black, with a fitful wind stirring the river in puffs. The star clusters overhead were hazy, and there was no moon. I saw no lights in the house, nor any below on the river. Knowing better than to take the path, I kept upon the grass and under the trees, till well away from the house.

The old tool-house was a tumble-down building, some distance from the stable, set in a thick bunch of alders and arbor-vitae. It stood at the end of the lawn near the meadows, out of sight of the house, and I could move less cautiously as I neared it. The blackness under the clustering bushes was intense, almost palpable; one involuntarily shrunk from it, yet here was plainly the place appointed.

A certain nervousness lay hold of me as I pushed aside the branches, but all was still within. I found myself in a little cave of darkness, my back against the wall of the tool-house, the sheltering growth hemming me in, while above my head a clearer dark, if one may put it so, showed in a patch of sky. To stand in absolute blackness for ten minutes waiting for the unknown, is trying to the stoutest nerves. It is like being forced to keep the eyes shut; there is a constant effort to open them anticipating relief, while the other senses grow morbidly acute, so that the texture of a leaf seems rough and harsh to the finger, and the rattle of the wind among the twigs is like that of musketry. I had just made up my mind I could not stand it, but would wait in the open space beyond when my ear caught the step and rustle of an approach. I held my breath as the presence drew near over the grass; I heard the step move toward me and cease; then the bushes were parted as I had parted them. I strained my eyes, but though fully conscious some one stood there breathing, within touching distance of my hand, yet I could see no outline, I could only feel the eyes. The strain was too great. I spoke.

"Who is it?"

A woman's voice, one I had never heard before, answered, so close that I started back:—"I have brought a message from Marguerite."

There was a pause. I said, putting out my hand, "I cannot see anything. Is your dress black?"

"Black, all black," replied the other and a strain of melancholy ran in the voice.

"Pardon me," I went on, "but we must see to speak together. Where are you?" Just then my hands touched heavy folds of stuff, and then encountered wooden beads to which a cross with metal on it was attached. It was as I had supposed; Marguerite's messenger was the nun I had seen at her window. Strange occupation for a religious—but I had no time to speculate.

"No, we cannot talk here," said the voice, and the dress moved away. I followed, we came out upon the patch of lawn, which, dark as it was, seemed clear light compared to that cavern of trees. Then we paused.

"I hope, *ma sœur*," I began awkwardly, "*Mademoiselle* was not vexed at my request?"

She shook her head. I could see now her veiled hood, the white coif, and her hand against her dress.

"Marguerite sent me," the nun answered, speaking in a soft convent undertone, "first, because she could not come herself, and secondly, because I am almost as well qualified, Monsieur, to talk to you as she. I know her very well, and all her family. I knew her unhappy father the chemist; and there are circumstances....." she breathed and changed her phrase—"there are reasons, I mean, why references to the past are very painful to Marguerite, and would agitate her very much."

"I do not want to raise them, as I told her," I said earnestly. "I have offered to help her if she needs it....."

"She will need it," said the nun, "but you spoke of information.....?"

"Which I need from her; that is true, but it need not agitate her. Her father left some papers....."

The nun started at my words, and the beads rattled as they fell from her fingers.

"Papers,—" she stammered, "what papers—what do you mean?"

I drew nearer while speaking, "I mean papers relative to a chemical formula at which he was working for Mr. Adrian when he died."

She was peering at me. "And the name and everything!" she exclaimed, "you know!"

Her tone was one of deep incredulity and amazement.

"I know," I said significantly, for here I saw a chance not only at the formula but for the full explanation. "I know everything. But it is that formula I want now. If you or Marguerite can tell me where to find it,—I will let the rest go."

I could hear her gasp: "The rest!" she whispered, "the rest."

"I will let it go, if you will give me the formula," I said, purposely changing the terms of my demand. The woman, making a strong effort at self-possession, again began to finger mechanically at her rosary. I could hear the beads shake, but I could see nothing of her expression.

"I am thinking, Monsieur," she got out at length. "It is all a long time ago."

"Yes," I replied, "it is long ago, but such things always come out in time."

The random shot told and she quivered; then the undertone of her voice went quietly on. "I shall not deceive you, Monsieur, it would not become me even were it of any use. What I tell you is the truth; but I fear it will not help you greatly. Marguerite, poor child, herself

knows very little. She was at school when her father died, and she knew nothing until one day her mother....."

"Ah," I cried, "her wicked mother?"

"Her wicked mother—" the nun repeated solemnly, "came and took her away. But the day before she had received a letter from her father, containing a sealed envelope, which he bade her keep as it held valuable papers."

"And did she open it?"

"She opened it *afterwards*, yes Monsieur, and she found within it a sheet of parchment with what looked like a recipe."

"That was it!" I cried.

"Unfortunately, no, it was only a part." She paused, but my disappointment was too great for me to interrupt, and she continued more evenly,

"As I said, she did not examine it until after her father's death, and then in secret she took it to some one she trusted, a chemist, who would understand. And he said it was part only of a formula, and quite valueless without the other parts."

"It was marked with the five-dot mark?" said I in despair.

"The quincunx—yes Monsieur."

"And Mademoiselle Marguerite will let me look at this?" I asked, feeling it best to be content with half-a-loaf. The smooth voice answered, "Ah Monsieur, she would be very glad but she has it no longer."

This was a second and a harder blow.

"She did not keep it?" I asked incredulously.

"No Monsieur, she did not keep it." There fell a pause.

"I do not think you understand, *ma sœur*," I said politely, "I know everything."

"It is the truth, she did not keep it," she repeated obstinately.

"But she knows where it is?"

In the pause I could hear her breathing. "I—I do not think she does—" she whispered, and made as if to draw away from me.

"Think, think!" I commanded, and I took hold of her arm. "Think what I mean when I say I know! Where is the paper?"

"Oh God!" she said and choked back a sob.

"I do not want to insist," I said, and the curious part of it was that I spoke with as great a conviction as if I really did know all I pretended—"but you see yourself that I stand here in a position of personal danger.

Mademoiselle herself warned me of it, three days ago. I am sure she knows where to find that paper, and that she is willing to help me. Tell her I must see her.....”

“Ah, but that you cannot do!” she broke in, half pityingly, half-triumphant.

“That I must see her!” I repeated, “and if she leaves the Maison de l’Orme she must try and get a word to me where she is going; and I will certainly seek her out.”

“Suppose I refuse to take your message,” said the sister.

“You wear a strange costume to refuse!” I cried. “I do not know if holy women usually leave their convents to mix in such intrigues, but if your habit is not merely a disguise....”

She turned quickly and her eyes flashed indignantly into mine....“How dare you say so, Monsieur? My office is to nurse the sick and had you seen that poor, poor girl.....”

“I ask your pardon then,” said I, “but reflect a moment, and you will see that my suspicion is not so strange.”

I referred of course to her unconventional errand, but the remark seemed to touch her more deeply and she drooped her head with a profound sigh.

"Ah," said she bitterly, "it is not so strange—" and again her lips murmured a prayer. "It is getting very late," she said quietly after a moment. "Have you said everything?"

"You will take my message then?" I asked.

"I will take it."

"You will ask her to communicate with me, if she can?"

"If she can."

Was there a faint irony here? I was wondering, when suddenly she wheeled around and pointed with her outstretched hand.

"Look!" said she imperiously, "the lights! The Nénuphar is returning. You must go back at once to the house, Monsieur—or I will not answer for what may happen."

I also saw the lights of the steam-launch bobbing at the slip.

"Go quickly, go!" she repeated as I did not move. "You are foolhardy to linger."

"But you," I asked, "are you going to stay?"

"I shall go down to the slip and detain them till you are safe in your room," she explained. "Do not waste any more time, Monsieur, but go!"

I revolted at this. "You yourself may be in danger," I protested. "Won't they hurt you?"

She gave a shrug and a gesture. "Ah no!" she said with a dreary, bitter little laugh, "not now!"

And as I started reluctantly toward the house, I saw her hastening to the water's edge, her robe held up, her pace quickened almost to a run, her long veil streaming in the wind.

CHAPTER XIII

NUMBER TWO, AND CHAVAINAC

When I awoke the next morning it was with a feeling that I must make the best of what I hoped to be my last day at the Maison de l'Orme. The night's interview had shown me that my stay was becoming impossible, that freedom was now an essential to my business. I had therefore three things to do: to see Marguerite, to interview the man Chavaignac, and to get safely away from the house. Sheer audacity, I thought, might get me the first; the second was easy; how to accomplish the third, I had not a notion in the world.

The reader has not failed to note the gradual change which had taken place in my estimate of the friendly and philosophic M. le Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord. Once or twice, in contact with his geniality, his bonhomie and his charm, I had, as it were, gone deeper, touched ice, and chilled at the touch. Once or twice, meeting his eye, obtrusively frank, protestingly open, I had suddenly understood to

the core the significance of Shakespeare's phrase, "Honest, honest Iago!" Thus is made plain the fact that when I descended that morning to breakfast, found myself alone with him, and saw that he had for once laid aside his smiling mask and sat visibly preoccupied, morose and anxious, I experienced a fear such as no other person has ever inspired in me. Involuntarily, as I poured myself a cup of coffee, I remembered Marguerite's words, "Your life is merely a question of hour to hour." Yet I did not agree with Marguerite, for I believed that de Pétry had more reason to find out my real object than to kill me; that I was safe so long as I could play upon the mysterious and deep fear which the name Gellatly evidently inspired.

The Colonel read his newspapers, I sipped my coffee, in silence. Our eyes avoided each other. Presently I observed:

"I hope Mademoiselle Marguerite is well enough to receive visitors this morning?"

"Do you wish to be one?" smiled my obliging host.

"I do indeed," said I, and fixed an eye upon the ceiling as I went on with deliberation—"I take a deep interest in her since finding that she

was the daughter of an old friend of mine—a dear old friend!”

“Really?” replied the Colonel, and I must say I admired the intonation. “Have we other ties beside the Gellatly’s of Boston? Is it possible you knew my lamented brother?”

“The proper name of Mr. Joseph Balsamo, then, was Pétry?” I asked. This was an exceedingly bold shot, and fired, let me confess, out of sheer giddy audacity. My host was a man of resource, of wit, and of trained self-command, but it was impossible that such a remark should be wholly without effect. His ruddy hue changed somewhat; his eyes steadied, the pupils dwindled to two points. But he laid down his paper with a perfectly steady hand, and his voice showed just the right shades of surprise, cordiality and paternal anxiety, as he replied:

“So Marguerite told you she was the daughter of Balsamo.....extraordinary!”

I could have cut out my tongue for the imprudence, but it was too late, so I merely nodded.

“Upon my soul,” said de Pétry in a voice of concern, “the child’s condition must be even worse than I thought. Joseph Balsamo was my,

brother's intimate friend, it is true—but such an idea—incredible! The thing grows serious; when Marguerite's frenzy comes to cast such reflections on her dead parents, I feel it is time I should take steps!”

His tone, his accent, it was impossible not to believe them. I felt suddenly dismayed and mortified. Would not any sensible man have said to me, “Come, you are foolish. This man is respectable and convincing. It is his niece and yourself who are crack-brained and hysterical. What reason have you for imagining anything wrong in this case?”

Everyone, I think, undergoes such reactions in the midst of unusual situations; reactions of prudence, of conservatism. The frank counter-proposition by this quiet man of the world had an effect on my excited fancy like a jet of cold water.

“Possibly the mistake is mine.” I grudged this reply. “I may have jumped at conclusions which Mademoiselle did not intend.”

“She should not have given you cause. The idea not only distresses me—, it mortifies me exceedingly,” said the Colonel with dignity; and I seemed to see a man who felt with the utmost keenness the vagaries of a morbid child.

"It was doubtless my imagination," I hastened to assure him; and his tone was somewhat mollified as he replied:

"I do not say you are to be blamed," and returned to his newspaper. I was in a strongly reactionary mood of mortification and indignation at myself, and I took up a sheet of the newspaper to recover behind it. My feelings at the moment seemed absolutely with the Colonel,—but there is a truth that men are guided strongly and continuously by conviction alone, and that truth saved my life. I thought I was absorbed in an account of a lacrosse-match, yet my eye guided by this conviction I feel sure, stole a look at my host from the shelter of the page. Ah, he was no more absorbed in reading than I was; the face he bent over the sheet was contorted with fury and perplexity, he gnawed his iron-grey moustache; and the glance which I encountered whipped out and was gone, like the flash of a little snake across a path.

I should have believed him, I should have been lured easily into fancied security if he had been able to retain for half-an-hour longer, his mien of smiling bonhomie. As it was, his glance showed me a dangerous man, one I knew

for an enemy. I cooled; my nerves strung taut, once more I faced the combat. All this passed in sixty crucial seconds.

Mademoiselle Claire, entering from the terrace, found her guest and her father reading in apparent harmony. The latter arose and embraced her with his usual demonstrativeness; and I laid down my paper and stood also.

"By-the-way, M. de Pétry," I said as if to continue a conversation, "that interview with Mademoiselle Marguerite,—I should really like to have it, if you will ask her to name an hour."

"I am so sorry," said the Colonel smoothly, "but my niece charged me to deliver you her regards and farewells. She left us early this morning."

Already! I looked from father to daughter.

"She has left the Maison de l'Orme?" I asked, "and where has she gone?"

"Yes, she left us early to-day. The doctor had advised change of air and a complete rest. Marguerite is a deeply religious child, so she decided to make a retreat. How valuable," continued the Colonel enthusiastically, "are the aids of the Church to tired and burdened minds! A retreat is merely a species of rest-

cure,—and I have no doubt that when she returns the child will be infinitely benefited physically and much calmer in mind, don't you think so Claire?"

"I think it an admirable decision on her part," said Claire, with dignity.

There was nothing for me to do but leave the room, feeling that the enemy had scored a point. I stood on the terrace for a while, deep in thought. The sunshine was warm; the air brought the freshness of the wide spaces of the St. Lawrence; distant and faint came the peal of many bells from the grey town whose streets are never wholly free from that wild and musical clamor. Before me lay the avenue and the high-way—apparently, open, free,—yet I knew better than to try them, weaponless as I was. All about me seemed peaceful, simple, natural,—yet I was like a man who walks between iron walls, to some dark and terrible end. I might dare a dash for freedom and the town, but to do so meant to give up my quest, or worse even, to abandon the wretched girl who had cried to me for help.

I stood there as I have said, looking out and listening to the bells, and wondering if they were the last bells I should hear; if I should

ever again see the streets of Quebec, or feel Cecil's hand touch mine. I had become certain with a deadly certainty, that my gaolers were cunning and ruthless—that no chance in my favor was likely to interfere with their plans. I thought of Chavaignac, whom I was to see in an hour or two, and I speculated idly whether he was to be my executioner.....It was all so easy for them, and I had been such a fool!..

"I shall have to see it through!" I muttered and I set my teeth.

"See what through?" asked a voice at my elbow, and there was Claire, smiling her over-worked smile at me.

"Oh the interview with my friend, the habitant," I answered lightly. "He probably has even less English than I have French."

"I do not yet understand what you want with him," Claire suggested, as she seated herself near me.

"The business is not my own," I said shortly.

"Sometimes it is prudent to speak out, Monsieur Gellatly."

"Sometimes it is, Mademoiselle Claire."

"Ah, you are very distrustful of your friends," she remarked playfully, and showed

the points of her small sharp teeth. We were both silent for awhile.

"And Marguerite?" she asked suddenly.

"What of her?"

"You no longer wish to see her?"

"Not for the moment. Am I not more charmingly employed?"

"Poor Marguerite!" she mocked in her thin voice.

"But I hope to see her before I go," I added in as firm a tone as possible.

"Before you go? Indeed!" said she, and laughed her empty, cruel laugh, which in spite of myself turned me cold. At that moment the Colonel's appearance was in the nature of a relief. My worthy host was again all smiles and sunshine; he came to offer me his own study for the forthcoming interview with Chavagnac, and he pointedly asked his daughter to go for a drive.

From my window upstairs I saw them go, and looked at the two driving off with something of the feeling with which one watches a pair of cobras coiled together in a cage at the Zoo—particularly if the cage does not look strong. I wondered they dared to leave me, however, but did not wonder long. The cart

had not turned the corner of the avenue, before a man in the blue jeans of a gardener began to busy himself at the front of the house, and at the back there was always Dufour. It would be two or three to one, whether the Colonel was there or not.

My next thought was to wonder whether Marguerite had really gone, but of that there seemed no doubt. And while this was still in my mind, the silent, heavy-faced, stolid woman who was the only female servant at the Maison de l'Orme, came up to tell me that the man I wished to see was waiting downstairs.

I went at once to the Colonel's study. The shutters had been partially drawn against the strong summer sunshine, making a pleasant cool obscurity. Standing near the window I saw a tall Canadian in a typical habitant dress, the blue shirt, the heavy boots, the blue tasselled cap which he twirled between his fingers. So far as I could see, his appearance was equally typical; he had the blond moustache and bunchy blond hair of the Norman, with rather small black eyes. The man seemed an honest, slow-witted fellow, speaking little English, so that I had some trouble in following the long-winded history with which he began—all about Père

Antoine, and the message, and why he had come to Quebec that day. "The letter said I could tell M'sieu something and he would pay," he concluded, and I nodded.

"Yes," I said, taking a near-by chair, "I will pay well, if you answer my questions. You once lived in the States, I think?"

"Yes, M'sieu," he answered promptly. "I lived there for a few months."

"Four years ago, was it not?"

"M'sieu is quite right."

He stood in front of me still playing with his cap, his little bright eyes moving restlessly over the room.

"At that time you had a friend, a chemist—named Joseph Balsamo?"

He nodded assent.

"And this Balsamo died," I went on slowly, "under peculiar circumstances?"

This time he did not look at me.

"M'sieu has heard.....?"

"I *know*," I said emphatically, "It is useless to try to deceive me, as you will see."

"If M'sieu knows,—all," the man said hoarsely,—though I noticed his color did not change, "he must know that I, Pierre Chavaignac, am entirely innocent."

"That may be," I said, and then I paused. My ear had caught the faint scrape of a foot on the veranda behind the shuttered windows. "It's too warm in here to talk," I cried loudly, and going to the windows, I threw the shutters wide. The veranda was empty. In the flood of sunlight I wheeled a chair to the window, and sat where I could command the view outside. The walls were thick, we were away from the closed door, so this manoeuvre put eavesdropping out of the question.

"Now the papers that Balsamo left," I continued, again facing Chavaignac, "were in your charge?"—

I did not go on.

In the newly entered, strong light from the window I noted the curious appearance of the man. The red burned in two spots in his cheeks, the rest of his face was ghastly white; I thought he trembled.

"I see M'sieu knows I am innocent—that I knew nothing!" he repeated, and moistened his dry lips.

"Others might not think so," said I sternly, "but if you will answer me truthfully, Chavaignac, I will do my best for you."

"I have M'sieu's promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

His face cleared with relief. When I cried impatiently, "Now tell me," his pause was only one of reflection.

"I was not the nearest friend to Balsamo, as M'sieu knows," said he sinking his voice. "But I liked him too, and I knew he feared those closer than I,—you understand? He told me when he found it—his preparation, and his dread lest the secret should be stolen from him. He wanted it kept for....."

"His daughter,—Mademoiselle Marguerite," I interjected. Chavaignac put a hand to his throat.

"M'sieu promised" he whispered desperately, and his eyes grew wild with fear.

"Yes, go on, go on!" I urged.

"He knew I was his friend—but he was so suspicious—ce pauvre Joseph! He would confide in nobody. But near the last he said to me, 'Pierre, mon ami, I confide in thee. This is a paper—it is to be kept for my little one,' and he gave me this. M'sieu sees I have kept it safely?"

We had drawn close together. The man fumbled in his shirt, drew forth a tiny leather bag and untied the strings. The perspiration

stood on my face as I watched him take out a tiny square of parchment, curiously folded. He handed it to me. It bore in Balsamo's handwriting, a name, "Pierre Chavaignac," a large number 2 and the mark $\cdot \vdots \cdot$; I broke the seal. Within was a line or two of writing and figures, but a glance showed me that it was only a part of the required formula. Then the light broke on me. The nun's description returned to my mind and the chemist's scheme became perfectly clear. Trusting no one wholly among his questionable associates, he had divided his formula into five separate sections, numbered each, and distributed them, giving each friend to understand he had the whole. Thus the quincunx was his symbol for the formula. Here was one number; I had heard of another—but the other three—!

The flash of thought in which I understood all this, a second after was driven out by another flash. Chavaignac bent eagerly toward me and the sunlight beat full on his face. Over the right ear there showed a patch of short white hair under his yellow wig!

"This is what I want, I will pay you well for it," I said quietly, and took a step nearer. Then with a sudden movement the whole golden

wig was in my hand, and there stood before me blinking, but not disconcerted, a head I knew; the bullet head covered with scanty white hair, the pale face painted into ruddiness, the little shifty eyes of the butler, Dufour.

"You villain!" I cried, and sprang at him.

"Not so loud M'sieu!" he cried, "not so loud!"

"How dare you trick me?" I repeated, for I was furious.

"I did not," he repeated. "Chavaignac is my name, and I am he M'sieu wished to see."

At this I sat down dazed. "It was you, all the time?"

"It was I, and you will not blame me when you understand, M'sieu Gellatly! I am in your hands. I can do nothing,—I will obey, you shall have the paper, only I beg you not to tell the Colonel!"

The man's agony of fear was not assumed, and I began dimly to see the chance of an ally. The subordinate had failed in his game, and I had no reason to think his superior would be lenient—thus, fear might throw the former upon my side, if I could play on it.

"I have promised," I said, and he hung on my words, "because I believe you may be innocent of the worst."

"I am—it is God's truth, I am!" he protested.

"Then tell me why you did not give Marguerite the paper as her father told you?"

"And have it taken from her?" he broke out.

"That would have been no kindness, M'sieu!"

There was truth enough in this, and I saw it; my tone grew less angry, for I began to understand something of the man's position.

"Look here," I said, "if I am to hold my promise to save you, I must hear the whole. I do not need to show you, Dufour, that for some of you there is a rope at the other end of this matter." He drew breath at this, and I paused to let it have due effect. "If it is not to be for you, I must have a better return than this useless paper. Will you answer my questions?"

"The Virgin knows I will, M'sieu! And, as to the paper, I no sooner knew Ma'amselle Marguerite had one like it than I heard her say it was gone. Ma'amselle had an affection for me, M'sieu—she knew me innocent!... Often she said, 'Dufour, I believe you are my only friend in this house.' Would you not have kept silent, M'sieu, and hid the paper in secret as I did? For the Colonel swore he would find the

others, saying he had a right—that they were his. And then I thought—you have seen him, he is a terrible man—that it would be a good plan to have—to have—”

He faltered and I finished for him:— “A card up one’s sleeve in case of need?”

“Yes, M’sieu,” and his little eyes dropped from my face to the floor.

“And then?” said I, “I came,—knowing all—”

“Knowing all!” he repeated, “and bearing the name, and so brave, so careless!..... The rest of us, we had thought of the Colonel till then as the Devil himself, whom nothing could touch—yet he too was afraid of M’sieu, he too did not understand!” The grey pallor of fear crept again upon his face as he went on. “We tried warning you, and you would not go—we tried to frighten you, yet you did not run, and I for one saw no end but—” he made a gesture with his supple hand about his throat.

I remembered a name and fired it, like a chance arrow.

“So you and Signor Vettori were scared?” I said.

He stood silent, a weakened, a ghastly fig-

ure—I began to believe in my star, and I hurried on.

“You are in my pay from this moment, Chavagnac. Go. Do not say a word to the Colonel, and do your work as usual. I shall leave this house to-day, and I shall give you my address where you can report to me. It is the only way you can save your neck, my good friend.”

“And if he asks me?” he murmured.

“Tell him I wanted information about the late Balsamo’s daughter. Tell him,” here I laughed, “that I came from Mr. Adrian, the leather manufacturer—that there is money owing to Balsamo’s heirs.”

He stared admiringly. “M’sieu is the Colonel’s very match for lying,” he commented, “Who would have believed it?”

“One thing more. Where is Marguerite?”

This time he looked sincerely troubled.

“Do you think he would tell *me*? Ah, if I only knew I would tell you, M’sieu Gellatly, gladly! They took her away because they thought she had been talking.”

“You must find out where she is for me.”

“I will do my best,” he replied doubtfully, and then gave a start. “Listen, he has re-

turned!" he whispered. I too heard the trotting of a horse up the avenue, and I rose.

"You can go," I said hurriedly, "but remember!" and I left him bowing, and mechanically twirling the woolen cap in his shaking hand.

The cart drew up to the step, the Colonel and his daughter alighted, and the horse was taken to the stable by the prison guard in blue overalls. All this I watched, sheltered behind the drawing-room curtains, and when my host came in he found me enjoying a cigar and a book.

"A satisfactory interview, I hope, my dear Gellatly?"

"Quite, my dear de Pétry."

"Was the fellow an obstinate boor, as they are so often?"

"Oh no—that would be harsh. I had trouble at first, but after that we got on famously."

He could not hide his surprise. "You got your information then?"

"All I required, in full. But you, did you drive far?"

"A long way on the Lorette road. Pepin went splendidly; he will have to rest this afternoon."

I recalled the shining brown horse capering and dancing on its way to the stables, and the

foot I had heard on the veranda, and I smiled. But the Colonel was occupied with other thoughts, and did not notice my amusement. He excused himself in some haste, and I knew without being told that he went at once to the butler's pantry.

Meanwhile, I sat where he had left me, and my smile gave way to a frown of perplexity. I was face to face with the next step—the important step of leaving the *Maison de l'Orme*. I knew enough of men to know I could not count on Chavaignac; I knew enough of the genial M. de Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord to know that if I did not leave in the next hour—before he found out everything—I had very little likelihood of leaving at all. And if I stayed—but here my reflections became melodramatic: I could only tell myself that I must—I must go! And in the thought I raised my eyes from my book, and in an instant I was on my feet. What I saw was the most natural thing in the world, merely an express-wagon from the town driving up the avenue. But the driver was a big, burly, honest-faced fellow; there was a half-grown lad beside him on the seat, and the sight of them meant life, freedom, everything, to me.

I was on the step in two bounds, and met the man face to face as he scrambled down from the seat.

"I'm very anxious to get to the town at once," I said; "a telegram makes it necessary for me to reach there without delay. I'll give you ten dollars to let me go back in your wagon."

He hesitated, but only from surprise, as I could see.

"Why, sir," he replied,—he was evidently English-Canadian, as I was glad to find, "it's rather unusual, but....."

"The case is unusual," I began, and just then the door opened, and Colonel de Pétry stood upon the step. His eye flashed upon the group and settled upon me.

"My dear Colonel," I said, "a telegram has just recalled me. I must return immediately in this good man's wagon, if he will let me."

"In the express-wagon!" cried my sympathetic host, "but why, my dear Gellatly? I will send for the trap for you."

"You forget. Pepin has been too far already to-day, and must rest. This is an excellent opportunity if you will forgive its abruptness."

"But your clothes, my dear friend!"

"You will be so kind as to send them after me, to the Frontenac."

"I cannot let you go like this," he said.

"I fear I must," said I.

"It is absurd! At least come in and let us discuss it."

"Thanks, but my hat is here."

He could not keep all signs of his anger from his face, and I saw the express-man and the boy exchange glances. I put my foot on the wheel.

"I'm infinitely obliged for your hospitality, and your help," I said gayly, "but I mustn't keep this good fellow waiting. Thank you and au revoir!"

"Won't you come in at least and say good-bye to Claire?" said he. I saw his hand go idly to the pocket of his coat, and if ever I saw murder in a man's eye, I saw it then.

"Thank Mademoiselle for me," I said from the wagon, "and—will you come a little nearer?"

He came and stood by the side of the wagon and our eyes encountered.

"Mademoiselle Marguerite's convent—" I said, "may I have the address?"

"She would not be allowed to see you," he replied, "even if she wished. A retreat cannot be disturbed with callers."

"The matter is important and urgent."

"It is against religious practice. It would never be permitted."

"But it concerns life and death," I said significantly, "three years ago, I know, but still However, you may do my errand for me if you will."

"I cannot wait, sir," remarked the expressman. I leant close down to the Colonel's furious, contained face.

"I gave Mademoiselle some important papers," I went on, "relating to our mutual friend, the late Balsamo. Will you get them back from her since I cannot?"

"I will see that they are returned," said he shortly, and turning upon his heel walked into the house. The expressman picked up the reins and looked at me in surprise, for I whistled loudly as we rattled down the avenue.

CHAPTER XIV

MY WORK BEGINS

"Queer folk in that there house, they say," remarked the expressman as we turned out of the gate.

"Oh, do they?" I asked him, interested.

"The old man didn't want to let you go, now, did he?"

"Merely his hospitality," said I.

"Well, if you ask me, I should say you're well out of it," concluded the expressman, chirruping to his horse, and his boy and he once again exchanged looks.

I was of the same opinion. Never seemed road so beautiful as that white, warm, dusty highway, or vehicle more to my taste than the express-wagon. True, I was without a supply of extra clothes, and likely to remain so for some time to come, for even if my friend the Colonel did send them to my hotel, I was not likely to be at liberty to claim them there. To-day, as I felt, my work began; the real task, the labor, the running to earth, was in my

hands from this moment. I was free to act, my actions must count henceforward. My first errand in Quebec will not be hard to guess.

I bought the finest small revolver I could find and a good supply of ammunition. The touch of its butt gave me confidence and courage, and when I came out of the shop, St. Joseph street had lost its suggestion of lurking ambush. Then I turned to the task of finding a lodging, aided by some addresses which the expressman had furnished me. The Frontenac was an impossible residence for a man with my work on hand, and besides I wished a lodging nearer to the Maison de l'Orme. After some search I found it, a very good room in a quiet house on the Rue St. Cecile Boivin, and paid for it most thankfully. Then again I set out, to snatch a mouthful of dinner, and make a tour of some cheaper clothing houses for the necessities I lacked. I fitted myself from head to foot in the blue shirt, wool cap, rough trousers and boots of the French Canadian laborer, to which I added a black beard and wig, and in this disguise feeling very much like the villain in a melodrama, I set out again for the Maison de l'Orme.

What I had to do was plain. The story I

had told M. de Pétry about the papers I had given to Marguerite would have an effect upon which I thought I might calculate with certainty. Whether he believed it or not, he must inevitably go to Marguerite herself to find out the truth, and where Colonel de Pétry went I meant to follow. I could do nothing it seemed to me, until I found Marguerite and talked with her, and in this chase I meant to seek the assistance of the redoubtable Dufour.

Of course, I did not go near to the front of the Maison de l'Orme. I took the back lane, skirmished through the undergrowth and marched boldly to the kitchen door. As I hoped, Dufour was there and bade me 'be off' roughly enough, although he at the same moment put a big piece of bread into my hand. It was good, however, to see him start and cringe, when I spoke in my natural voice:—

"Merci, M'sieu,—but it is not food I want—this time."

"You are mad, sir, I believe!" he gasped out, shutting the door after him as he came out on the step, "The Colonel is in a rage—*Mon Dieu!* I have never seen him worse. If he sees you—well, you will die here and no one will be the wiser!"

"Don't be a fool, Dufour—do you think I am alone in an affair like this? Look here," and I fixed him with my eye, "if I disappear, others will follow, who may be less inclined to believe in your innocence in the Gellatly affair, my good fellow."

"Not so loud, sir," he whispered, his eyes staring. "What is it you want?"

"I've no time for discussion," I told him. "The matter is this. So long as you obey me, my word of honor, you shall have your chance. If you betray or disobey—there will be no discrimination between persons, when the time comes. That is all. And now answer me. Where is the Colonel?"

He jerked his head in the direction of the house. "In there, sir, and mad as a demon."

"He has not left the house since I went?"

"No, sir, he has been....."

"Searching my trunk," I finished the sentence with a smile. "That is all right. Now I believe as soon as he dares he will go to where he has sent Mlle. Marguerite. We must divide the watch. I will take the day, you, being in the house, the night. You must report to me when I come here at six o'clock every morning. If he leaves in the night, you must track him, find out where he goes and bring me word."

"M'sieu means no harm to Mademoiselle?" he asked doubtfully.

"I am the only friend she has in the place, except yourself," I replied impatiently, "I promised her to find where she was and to help her. If you refuse to aid me the harm will come to her."

"I will help all I can—but if he should know?"

"He must not know, that is all. Did you see her go this morning, yourself?" I asked, as I was about to move off.

"Only at a distance, sir. I knew better than to try to speak to Mademoiselle," he assured me. "She left in the cart with the sister who attended her, and her face was covered with a long, thick veil."

"Doubtless she has gone to some convent—or it may be to some hiding place. Wherever it is, I must know it. I shall return at six to-morrow," and giving him a nod, I retreated into the bushes, fully satisfied that the man would do as he was told.

I was at my post early the next morning, refreshed and strengthened by a night's sleep in security. Prompt to the hour, I saw Dufour come out from the kitchen and steal down to

the shrubbery, giving furtive backward glances as he ran. On seeing me he gave a gasp almost of relief.

"I have watched as M'sieur wished," he said, "but the Colonel—Oh, he is a terrible man!"

Evidently fear of his superior was now added to his other fears in Dufour's mind. It was stamped visibly upon his face, and as he made me his report, his eye shifted uneasily and his hand shook. The Colonel had made no attempt to leave the house. Dufour had watched all night as agreed, but it had been without developments. Earlier in the evening the two men had talked, and de Pétry had apparently succeeded in reviving in his subordinate the sense of his own cunning and power. This talk was chiefly about myself, the danger menacing them through me, his vain search in my effects, (here I laughed) for anything to give them a clue. His failure to identify me had aroused de Pétry to a perfect frenzy of suspicion and hate. "He knows not whom to trust, now," the man said naïvely, "since M'sieu knows all that passed three years ago."

I nodded. I was well satisfied in the strategy of painting the wooden cannon black—but I foresaw the time was at hand when I should need real artillery.

"You were quite right about Mademoiselle," Dufour proceeded, "she is not in any convent, for he said to me himself, 'I could not put her with a lot of tattling women,' and he laughed, sir, in a way to turn me cold."

"And he said nothing to suggest he meant to go to her?" I questioned.

"Nothing, M'sieu. When he spoke of her—he only sang under his breath, and laughed, as I have told you. And then he said, 'Never fear, Pierre mon ami, you and I have been in worse places than this,'—and it is true, M'sieu,—but then,....."

"You were both on the same side, eh?"

"He has never been a fair comrade," Dufour broke out hotly, "I have been as true as a brother to him, and never asked a share—all these years, M'sieu, look at the pittance he has given me, but when it comes to Mademoiselle—"

"You are right, man, it is the time to stop," I said kindly, for the fellow had honest and loyal points. "Now go back to your work in the kitchen. If he leaves the house during the day, I will follow him, and to-night will be your turn again."

He shook his head in a depressed way and walked back to the kitchen-door, and I skirted

round towards the front of the house to the bushes opposite the gate, where, remembering Pepin the brown cob, I had tethered a very fair little saddle horse.

It was ten o'clock when Pepin and the cart, the upright figure driving them, swung out of the avenue on to the Quebec road. I had been taking the restlessness out of my beast by a canter, and fortunately saw them coming and got well off in the opposite direction. "Now my work begins," I thought, as I pulled my steed's head around and set off steadily behind Pepin's cloud of dust.

M. de Pétry de Chambord went to Quebec, put up his team at a stable, and made a round of the city on foot. I followed, put up mine at the same stable, and began light-heartedly enough to walk in his wake, at a distance so that my face could not be examined. The business sounds easy:—I commend it with my honest curse to my worst enemy, as the most heart-breaking I ever undertook. I think at times the devil must have entered into the man, he did so many things, he walked so fast, was so untiring, was so exasperatingly capricious in his choice of routes—visited so many shops, and had so little thought of luncheon. It was three

o'clock before I saw him safe on the road home again, and four ere I had an instant to snatch a mouthful at a public-house. Thereafter, I was never without provisions in my pocket, and many a meal I had to take in the saddle or on the corner of a street.

That day's work was a sample of the rest of the week. The Colonel spent his evenings at home; and I crawled to my lodging, dusty, spent and weary, for an hour or two of sleep. Dawn found me on my post as white and haggard almost as Dufour who met me there, met to tell me always the same story of his own night watch over a soundly sleeping man. To distrust Dufour was impossible when one looked at him; the fellow was grey, worn and possessed by unknown terrors; each time de Pétry clapped him on the shoulder, or called him 'mon ami,' he shook with blind, superstitious fear.

I would try to cheer the man, and we would part, I to my horse in the bushes and my dreary footman's round; he to tasks and terrors I knew and sought to know nothing of. No sign of Marguerite's whereabouts had been revealed to me by the week's watch. The Colonel visited no houses or convents, or mysterious places; he was an idle, energetic person; he shopped, he

played billiards, he lingered in the Governor's Garden, and when the whim took him he climbed the town walls and made a circuit of their tops. He made no sign of knowing he was followed, unless you take his restless wanderings; but these I myself set down to habitual caution and some trouble of mind. On Sunday he went to church, and I rested my tired bones in a back pew where I was edified by his Catholic fervor, and the flowers in his daughter's hat.

On the Wednesday following, the tenth day of my watch, there was a slight change in affairs at the Maison de l'Orme. Pepin and the cart did not appear, but instead, furniture vans drew up to the house and took away a large part of its contents. Shortly afterwards a calèche drove up, and Mademoiselle Claire dressed for a journey, bade her father an affectionate farewell and was driven off in it. I hated to let her slip, yet I knew he was the more important game, and I had a hope that matters were coming to a crisis.

I spoke of this to Dufour, but was disappointed to find that the Colonel expected to go on living by himself in the Maison de l'Orme, for some time to come. "M'sieu knows his affairs," Dufour went on to suggest, "they need him there."

"You mean his confederates in smuggling," I commented frankly, "need a house with a prepared door?"

"And you found out about the door, too!"

"How did I get out to get my letters that day, dunderhead?"

"True," assented the man, and nodded with naïve admiration, "I have never seen anything like M'sieu, moi! If anyone can beat the Colonel, he will." He added timidly: "Do you think he will soon find Mademoiselle?"

"Just so soon, Dufour, as he feels himself safe."

"Why does he not leave here altogether, and go somewhere else for a time?"

I had often asked myself that question, for it had been my one dread. I answered him what I believed to be the truth.

"Either because she is near here, or else he would have to leave those behind him whom he does not trust."

"Moi, M'sieu?"

"Possibly."

His mouth gave a nervous twitch which the strain of the last few days had made habitual, and he touched me on the sleeve.

"It is God's truth that I fear you," he said

lowering his voice, "for I have cause, I know, but not as I fear the Colonel! If he does suspect me.....M'sieu, then there is no use in my helping you for you cannot save me."

"Stuff and nonsense, man," I cried roughly, "What harm can he do to you? You're nervous!"

"M'sieu Gellatly remembers....."

"Well, what?"

"His father?" Dufour whispered, as if hardly daring to speak. I jumped—my father! So that was their idea, was it? I began to laugh.

"Why man!" I said still laughing into his horrified face, "how old do you take me for? Anthony Gellatly was only thirty-six when he died three years ago!"

"We—the Colonel thought of that—but still....." Dufour stammered, "if you are not, sir, why then.....!"

"The question is not who I am," I interrupted quickly. "Is your name Dufour, my friend? Or is his de Pétry?"

"Mon Dieu, I do not understand!"

"You need not try. As for the other Gellatly, I know what you mean to say. He was dis-trusted also, and he died, by an accident."

Dufour kept silence, and I asked:—

“After all, what reason have you to think the Colonel suspects you of watching him?” He made a helpless gesture.

“There is nothing—nothing! Save that his eye is kind and he calls me ‘Pierre mon ami,’ and promises me money if things go well, and confesses often to the priest. It is just that I *feel* he knows.”

“And you are afraid of him?”

“He is a terrible man, M’sieu!”

“You must take courage;” I assured him, although I was not unaffected by his terror, “perhaps we are wrong and he knows nothing. Even if he does, he will not dare to touch you.”

Again he made that gesture of helplessness. “If he knows, then I am dead,” he said simply, and as our interview was over we parted, and he walked back to the house with hanging head.

All that day I watched the Maison de l’Orme, but nobody came out. Sometimes I saw de Pétry at the windows, and Dufour pass and re-pass on his household duties. Luckily the weather was fine—I had been favored all along by splendid summer days, and I was glad, like a tired hound, to rest in the shade. Dusk came and the lamps were lit; I took my way homeward, pretty well discouraged and worn-out.

I used to buy a local newspaper on my way to my post in the mornings, and on the eleventh day I did so without misgiving. A name caught my eye on the front page, I stood still, and my heart went down, down.

A man named Pierre Dufour, the paper asserted, employed as butler in the house of Col. de Pétry de Chambord, had been beaten by roughs late last night and had died early that morning in the Quebec Hospital. The information was scanty, but it told me more than it knew. The man's body had been found just after eleven o'clock in the narrow lane leading to the river by some passers-by. He was fearfully beaten about the head, but still breathed. The finders, who refused to give their names, had carried him up to the house. "Fortunately," the paper stated, "they found the master of the house still up and dressed, and he had instantly identified the man as his servant. An ambulance had been summoned, and Colonel de Pétry accompanied the dying man to the hospital, where he spent the night. M. de Pétry had been much shocked, had described the man as a faithful servant, and could assign no reason for the assault except the large number of water-side roughs who frequented

Sillery. He was to make a further deposition before the Coroner's inquest that morning."

Ah, poor Dufour! How well he had foreseen the end! To me the whole thing was simple. Half an hour later the men might have knocked in vain at the Maison de l'Orme, and my prey would have escaped me. The Colonel's plans had miscarried, but it did not look as though that slip were likely to change the end. For I must watch alone henceforward, and I could not help seeing it was with very small likelihood of success.

CHAPTER XV

NUMBERS ONE AND THREE OF THE QUINCUNX

I had bought and read this newspaper, standing by the toll gate just across from Wolfe's monument, in the quiet of the early morning. When I had done I folded it up, and paused in the vital perplexity the news brought me. For which way should I go? On one hand was the trudge to the Maison de l'Orme, where I had small hope of finding my quarry. On the other was the walk in the opposite direction to the General Hospital, where, if again I erred, I might lose valuable time. However I must make a decision, so, relying rather desperately upon the newspaper, I decided upon this latter course.

The morning was fresh, and I walked briskly, turning back by the Rue Dorion to Sauvageau Hill, and so to the Boulevard Langelier. I knew the hospital building well, but the sight of it suggested a thousand difficulties in the way of my task. How could one man watch on all sides and take note of every door—? The only

thing to do was to enquire boldly at the main entrance if de Pétry was still within, and to act upon such information as I might receive. But my chance seemed desperate and I hurried on, unwilling to let myself think of it, so slight it appeared.

The heights had been silent and empty, but the lower town was broad-awake and full of activity and life. The maze of little streets with their saintly names resounded with calls and the chatter of patois. I glanced up, I remember, at the corner of the Rue St. Colomb, at some bright roof or quaint window, and a second after I came face to face with the man himself.

The suddenness of the encounter saved me for I had gone by before I actually realized it. He was walking quickly, switching a heavy cane, and his face wore the look of a man who had received a check. It was angry and determined, and absorbed in thought, so that he did not even glance at the laborer with the black beard. As for me, I underwent fresh confidence and hope, and even a certain exhilaration, as I turned once more upon his trail.

De Pétry made no attempt to return to the Maison de l'Orme. He took a street car pres-

ently and I lingered on the platform and held a newspaper before my face. Then he alighted and I alighted, and the customary round began, with greater variety and vivacity in his movements than ever, and with more determination on mine. I went hungry that day, you may believe, and I was strained and stiff; more than once I thought he suspected; I thought I had lost him. When he lunched at the Frontenac, I had to make a sentinel's round of the exits, walking as fast as possible; my eyes were weary, my hand shook with nervousness. After luncheon, however, matters went better. The Colonel took his cigar on the terrace, and I dropped exhausted upon a bench in one of the pavilions.

There he sat; tranquil, leisurely citizen, enjoying the unique view between puffs of smoke. He meditated. I could see the movement of his disturbed glance, the knitting of his brows over the problem. There he sat, the handsome, soldierly gentleman, playing with his cane. I believed his hands to be at that instant red with yesterday's murder,—with how many murders in the past who knows?—I called to mind his powers of convincing, his little phrases, his little adjurations, his incredible hypocrisy, his

monstrous personality, and I felt a touch of something like admiration—such as a man feels perhaps, when he comes at last face to face in the forest glade with the stately stag he has been tracking so long.

“Ah, M. le Colonel Horace de Pétry de Chambord!” I thought to myself with inward exultation, “this is your last fight, my friend, and we will see which wins.”

A north wind roared down the St. Lawrence, and seemed to shake loose the tongues of a hundred bells over the city. The scarlet folds of the flag above the citadel streamed upon the wind like the flame of a torch. Bright life seemed to sparkle on that fortified cliff; outlines were clear-cut; the bells, the color, the air, mounted to the brain like wine. My pulse beat steadily, and Heaven knows I had need. We sat there, he and I, not twenty feet apart, upon Dufferin Terrace, and looked out upon the busy ferry-boats and the shining river and all the veins and arteries of the Lower town.

He started up St. Louis street about half-past five. An announcement of summer opera bouffe at the Academy of Music caught his eye, and he went across and bought two seats for that night. I loitered within ear-shot and then

promptly went in and bought another seat some rows further back in the middle of a line. I was particularly pleased with myself for this precaution, remembering how one is apt to notice the people on the end seats. Then he took a calèche for the Maison de l'Orme, and I followed in another a quarter of a mile behind. I saw him safely into the house at a quarter of seven o'clock; and then with a sigh I drove rapidly to my own lodging. And I have never been more tired in my life.

I was early in my seat at the theatre, and need not have been for the Colonel was late. The curtain rose indeed while his seat was still empty. A fair performance began, with bright music and high-spirits to atone for its lack of finish, and I am bound to say I relished it, and that it diverted my mind. It may have been this diversion, or the stupefying days spent in the open, or the strain of the last week which rendered me so dull. Will any-one believe that I let slip the first entr' acte, merely wondering what delayed the Colonel, and turning my head to watch for his coming in? The second act opened upon the shabby, cheap scene, and the soubrette, haggard in her battered finery, sang a song, beginning "Beware, he deceives thee!"

To this day I can see the honest, startled faces turned toward me, as I rose with a loud ejaculation, and literally ran out of the theatre.

In the street I must have behaved like a man distracted. Oh, double, triple-dyed idiot I had been not to see through the trick! Of course he knew he was being watched, he had laid his plans there, sitting on the terrace, while I vaingloriously exulted! It was past nine o'clock, he had two hours start—no doubt he was gone and with him my last chance at the Quincunx, at the whole mystery, or to help Marguerite Balsamo. To have watched so long, and to be out-generalled at the last.....!

My impulse was go sullenly home, take my ticket and turn my defeated back upon the whole affair. But I remembered that men had found poor Chavaignac—there had been a miscalculation of time in that case, there might be again. I lost five precious minutes getting a calèche, and I offered an enormous fee to drive like the devil to the Maison de l'Orme. The driver was not unwilling, his horse was good; we covered the three miles in a dead gallop, and I halted him at the avenue gate, slipped the gold into his hand and bade him wait there in the road for me. When I think of it, it makes me laugh.

With my hand on my weapon, and much in the mood to use it, I walked rapidly up to the house. It was a moonless night studded with stars, a filmy shifting light in the north sky showed with the north wind. But there was no light in the Maison de l'Orme; its windows gaped unmistakably empty and blank. I walked all round it, peering and prying, but it was evidently quite deserted.

The wave of anger and disappointment which swept over me as I stood on the veranda, I will not attempt to describe. It was impossible to believe that I had failed, hopelessly and ignominiously, after my long struggle, after accomplishing so much!... I would not give up, I simply stood there, reluctant to abandon the place, to jog home in my calèche, a beaten man. And while I waited, in this agony of furious indecision, suddenly a sound came out of the night toward me in the pauses of the wind. *It was the sound of running feet rapidly approaching the house from the river.* I heard it in a silence between two blasts, pat, pat, upon the gravel-path—then I lost it in the roar and rustle, and heard it again much nearer, pat, pat, pat.

Another silence, the feet had left the gravel

path for the grass—and then, just as I blotted myself into the hawthorn-bushes, a yard from the veranda—I saw the runner himself crossing the lawn, with a light, long stride. It was not de Pétry—that I saw at once—but a man much younger. He made straight for the house; I watched him, breathless. With no special effort at silence he crossed the veranda, and fumbled at the prepared door into the Colonel's study. Indeed, he left it open behind him, so I could see plainly the spark of a match and then the steady light of a lamp. I crept nearer and looked in. The man's back was toward me as he stood at de Pétry's desk: he had opened a drawer and was hastily rifling it, tossing the papers it contained right and left upon the floor. Evidently his haste was great, his movement swift and nervous, but at last I saw him pause as if satisfied and hold something he had found closer to the light for examination. I was at the door by this time, and I could see plainly that he held two small square pieces of yellowish parchment, curiously folded and sealed.

The sight of them simply swept from me every instinct of prudence or caution, kindling me at once to violent action. I had pulled my

hat well down upon my brow, and no doubt presented a very passable figure of a desperado. And desperado I was in the real sense, as I made straight for the man covering him with my revolver. He turned with a gasp. He was only a lad, dark and slim, curly-haired and brown-eyed; his face marked with Latin restlessness and gayety was now the picture of amazement and terror.

“Throw up your hands!” I cried to him.

The fellow did not move save to obey me; his gaze was fastened as if fascinated upon the shining barrel,—he did not stir even when I approached nearer to the table, and deliberately took the two pieces of parchment, (they were marked 1 and 3) and put them in my pocket. Then he sprang at my throat.

It was a sudden and brave assault on his part, and for an instant I was disconcerted. We struggled violently for the possession of the pistol, and we were a fair match, for he was a lithe, strong fellow and active as a cat. I saw him try to get at his knife and had to keep him off that and my pistol as well, which was no light task, although I had some advantage in weight. The room was small and in our fight we battered to and fro against the furniture

and amongst the scattered papers. For five minutes neither gave way and I saw it would not be easy to beat the man off in a fair combat. As we drew near the desk therefore, I swept the lamp to the floor, and at the same instant fired in the air. The man went limp in my arms at the noise, but I was hindered by the dark as well as he, and before I realized it he had wriggled from my grasp and made a dash from the door to the lawn.

Out across the dewy grass he ran, and I after him at top speed. I remember regretting as I went that I was obliged to leave all those papers scattered about the Colonel's study, for they must have been interesting reading, and I told myself I should return to them afterwards—such was the irony of my confidence! We had reached the bottom of the lawn, and it was plain that he was making for the river. Here I slackened pace, for the thought crossed my mind that I was really more interested in following than in capturing this fellow. Anxious therefore to give him the idea I had abandoned the pursuit, I turned aside into the undergrowth by the tool-house, crossed the little open space where I had talked with the nun, and so made for the St. Lawrence at an angle. The crack-

ling and swaying of the elm-branches overhead, the incessant murmur and sway of the low bushes through which I pushed, hid every trace of my passage from him, and his also from me. I hurried nervously, fearing I had made another error.

At last the undergrowth thinned; I stood upon open land; before me the water rushed and foamed, beaten into waves by the blast. I was twenty yards from the boat-landing, and there as I had hoped, the lights of the steam-launch bobbed up and down. A figure passed and re-passed in feverish haste; I saw it bend over the engine in the centre, and loosen the stay-ropes fore and aft. As I had suspected a voyage was to be undertaken.

The night was hardly tempting, the launch looked a mere leaf upon that broad furious river, yet I had gone too far to hesitate and my only fear was lest I should be too late. Luckily the wind hid all sound of my stealthy approach in the bushes, and there hidden I bided my time. When I saw him lift the rope from the iron ring and prepare to cast off, I took my weapon in hand, and ran down the slip full tilt. I fell upon the man with all my weight, knocking him prostrate, and at the same time giving the

launch a violent push from the slip. In a second the wind had us and swept us out into the river, while the man lay and looked up at me, stupified. I sat down, having taken out his knife and thrown it overboard, covered him with the revolver and spoke to him in Canadian French.

“Now,” said I, “understand that no one will hurt you if you behave yourself. If you would have stopped to hear reason there would have been no need for all this. I want nothing save to be taken to Colonel Pétry—for it is he, isn’t it? who sent you back for those papers? You are unarmed and I have five shots in this revolver. Moreover should you attempt treachery, you would have to reckon with the Colonel, for I am the Gellatly you have heard of, no doubt. You had best be quiet and obedient,—I want nothing except to be taken to M. de Pétry.”

It was hard to say if he understood me. He lay still giving merely a sort of grunt. What he would have done had the water been calm I cannot say, but certainly our present situation changed the aspect of affairs. In the middle of the St. Lawrence it was blowing a gale, and even while I spoke water splashed into the boat. I saw the white teeth of little waves around the

launch which was drifting at a dangerous angle.

"Get up man," I called to him roughly, "and take the wheel. It's no night for nonsense."

The other grunted again, sat up slowly, looked round him and then said with an expressive shrug: "As for seeing the Colonel to-night, I have my doubts for both of us. It was bad enough coming down with the wind. As for getting back.!"

He did not finish. The launch shivered, received a blow on the side and reeled under it; had he not sprang at once to the wheel we should have capsized. As it was, we were both instantly wet through.

"You see," I called to him good-naturedly, "it's a poor time for a quarrel. Shall we call it off till we are out of this?"

"What were you doing with Colonel's papers?" he demanded a trifle less gruff.

"Faith, I thought you were the burglar," said I, "till I saw you at the slip there—and that was no chance for an explanation."

He seemed struck by this. "And you only want to be taken to the Colonel?"

"That's all," said I, and ducked to avoid another wetting. The wind took his answer from me, and he had to repeat with his hands to his mouth.

“Well, let him settle with you then! This looks ugly enough for me. No games, M’sieu—parole d’honneur!”

“Bien—” said I, and put up my revolver very gladly.

“Take the wheel, then, while I get at my engine there,” he added in a business-like tone, and I buttoned up my overcoat and took the wheel; turning the prow by his direction down the river under the increasing buffets of the gale.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHASE OF THE NÉNUPHAR

The craft was a fifteen-foot open shell, with an engine forward and a padded seat aft. She was new and staunch with air-tight compartments, but sat low in the water, and had no protection from the sea save by a canvas cover, adjusted on hoops. This was now put up by my companion while I steered, affording welcome shelter to a man exceedingly ill-prepared for a sail on the St. Lawrence. Even with this in place, we took in water enough.

Fortunately, the clearness of the night let us see enough to avoid some of the worst seas, and once we had run past the town we hugged the shore more closely and made better time. We exchanged but few remarks, my unknown companion tended the engine, and, finding he knew his business, I obeyed him promptly at the wheel. Meanwhile, my mind, freed by the action from most of its anxieties, began for the first time to recapitulate, to set in order and to understand some of the incidents of the past

month, with a view to the pressing dangers of the near future. It is odd but I have never been clearer-headed than I was on that voyage, when I felt that a careless word and when I knew that a careless action meant almost certain death. This possibility however, seemed trivial compared to the crisis I was approaching, and for which I mentally, as it were, cleared my decks for action.

Long since, though too much occupied to reflect on it, I had succeeded in disentangling the two threads which formed the warp and woof of the mystery, and I had traced them separately to their two causes; one the nefarious proceedings of the present which I had decided to be elaborate smuggling, the other the tragic happenings of three years back. When you add to these two main currents, the two minor efforts,—*i. e.*, my own and de Pétry's, to obtain the precious formula, you see at once the probabilities of a general mystification. Indeed, from *their* point of view the mystery must have appeared absolutely uncanny. For suddenly, I walk in upon this confident and secure set of rascals—I myself, bearing a name only too well-known, in open search of another equally significant—I, myself, full of reserves, cautions,

and audacities, dropping, apparently, dark hints—acquainted, apparently, with things they thought safely buried years since; yet perfectly serene, undaunted and sure, willing to stay in their hands, even returning when they thought me escaped. In each successive incident: the dinner, my identification by the man at the gate-way, the glances of poor Dufour, the warning of Marguerite, their surveillance, the endeavor to get at my business—in all these—I repeat—one could read the terrified movements of criminals who feel themselves pursued in the dark. All this was natural enough, for had I known what they thought I knew, I could never have carried on the thing—it was my ignorance which had saved me. While I merely pursued my own search, I chanced to touch upon so many past crimes or scandals and with so sure a hand, that their fears had taken the proportions of panic, and they thought every instant to precipitate their own ruin. I owed everything, life, freedom such as it was, to my apparent omniscience, based—had they only known it—on two torn pages of Balsamo's diary!

As for the present state of affairs, I was convinced that M. de Pétry was occupied very

cleverly in smuggling precious stones across the border, a lucrative business, which, properly managed, is not nearly so hard as it ought to be. The "Nénuphar," the right number of confederates and an ingenious variety of methods, had probably stood him in good stead for years—and so far as I could see, he himself was in no danger. Some unfortunate would be caught in the United States,—but there would be nothing to connect him with M. le Colonel de Pétry de Chambord, that notable citizen of the province of Quebec.

Now that I was likely to meet this man, both our masks laid aside, what was to be my course? I possessed three numbers of the quincunx formula,—I had two more to collect, and I had to help the girl according to my word. I was alone, without resources except a revolver and a few cartridges, now without even an ally as I had had in Chavaignac. Truly the case looked desperate and the danger pressing, and yet I must go on, trusting to the impression of my power which these people had received.

There had been no talk between my companion and me for a long time. I tended the wheel, he bent constantly above his engine, or bailed out forward whenever we shipped water.

We were in the current, and the wind, bad as it was had steadied a little during the last hour—there were fewer flaws to skew our craft around in the eddies. It had grown very late, it must be close on midnight,—we had left Beauport behind us, and the roar of Montmorenci was dying out in our wake. The shore sheltered us a bit here for it was rising in hills to meet the Laurentian Mountains which now began to look nearer. I wondered where we were bound.

“How much further are you going?” I called to him in a pause, and he replied without turning his head,

“Not so far—beyond Ste. Anne. I will show you soon.” And again we were silent.

Suddenly he broke the pause with an exclamation of dismay. I glanced up; he stood erect, clinging to the iron hoop of the cover, and looking westward.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

He gave me a look. “The police-boat,” he remarked; and for a second I think he thought it was my work, but my unfeigned disgust cleared the sullenness from his face.

“You think she is following us?”

“I know it—” his answer was quick and certain—“I warned the Colonel but he would not

listen. There was an affair last month, you understand. They chased us, and one of them paid for it before we got away. I believe the "Nénuphar" is too well known. I slid by unnoticed when I came up, but now they mean to overhaul us. They must have put up below Montmorenci."

I also saw the lights of a good-sized steam-tug setting out from shore—about a mile behind us.

"Can she do it?" I enquired.

He shrugged his shoulders. "At least we can give her some trouble," said he, and turned to his engine. We had an advantage in being able to keep to the smoother, shallower water near shore, while the police-tug was forced to keep out in the wilder mid-stream. Thus for half-an-hour we seemed to gain, but the gain was but temporary. Fresh puffs of black smoke rose from the stack of the tug, and showed that she had by no means abandoned the pursuit. My companion whistled.

"There will be music in the mountains," said he. "Have you a good story up your sleeve, sir? for you're going to need it. And when we are so near, too!"

"They can't see us," I suggested, "because of this canvas cover. Can you swim?"

"To-night!" and he opened his eyes.

"It's a chance, if only a slim one. We can lash the wheel to keep her steady and then slip overboard ourselves and make for shore. They will lose time over-hauling her, and we will have a start on land."

"It's not a bad thought;" said he, "here are life-preservers too. If we do not drown we will get there somehow. I like the St. Lawrence for a bed better than the gaol, myself. Let us try it." He was a cool-headed youth.

Personally, I was in the frame of mind when any danger was better worth running than to lose time over my task. Nevertheless, as we set about our arrangements, a picture arose in my mind of my mother peacefully reading under the lamp. If she could know what I was doing—but thank heaven, she could not! The business took only a few minutes. I stowed my precious papers and money into my water-tight, tobacco-pouch. Getting up more pressure we set the nose of the launch into the stream, and could see the tug preparing to intercept us. I lashed the wheel firmly and loosened the canvas on the lee side of the launch. Then each of us bound with a life-preserver, we slipped out under the cover, hung for an instant in the

water and then let go. The little craft started forward with a bound of increased speed.

We were too far to be seen in the darkness except under the keenest scrutiny, and soon saw that we had succeeded in concentrating their attention on the 'Nénuphar.' So far so good, but the water was bitter and running in short choppy waves. To keep track of each other in that rough and icy sea was no easy matter and had not the current set in an eddy toward the shore just then, we should have been swept helplessly out into mid-stream. My companion was a good swimmer, but the task was too much for a man alone; we had to rest frequently, each helping the other; once a big floating timber hit him on the head, and I thought all was over with him. I had a little liquor in a flask and I supported him on a log for a few minutes till I could pour it down his throat. All this time my ears were strained for the sound of oars, but none came; and after ten minutes rest on the log, drifting helplessly, I struck out for shore again, towing him. Criminal he may have been; he was no coward, and he obeyed me like a soldier, or we should never have come out of it. I swam slowly and steadily, and he with his feet when he could summon the strength,

until the water grew shallow and we could stand erect. Then we sank exhausted into a clump of bushes near the shore. Far, far out, and a mile down the river I saw the tug not moving, with the lights of the little 'Nénuphar' close against her bow.

That kindly clump of shrubbery kept the wind from us as we cowered there for ten minutes, too worn-out to get dry. Indeed, my companion came very near to losing consciousness altogether, and I had to work hard and spend the last drop of brandy in restoring him. The work helped to start my own blood running again, and after a little we were able to undress and wring the water out of our clothes. It was while doing this that he turned suddenly to me and held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said to me very earnestly, "There is not one of them who would have done what you did just then—not one! They would have seen me drown first. I shall not forget."

"I may have need," was my thought, but aloud I only said: "They may try the shore next, we ought not to stay here. Do you know where we are?"

"Not far from Ste. Anne, by my reckoning," he answered, "and near the road we wish to

strike, I think. There is an auberge, Picot's, about half-a-mile away; what do you say to trying for it? I am not sure of my own legs in the mountains, unless I get thoroughly warmed first."

"Very good," said I, and we set out.

He seemed at least to know his ground, and led the way up the steep cliff, over fields and through woods without faltering. By and by we came out upon a road, and not far off a light twinkled in a low, steep-roofed cottage, half inn, half village store. My companion led the way, and after some knocking and banging, he succeeded in rousing the proprietor, M'sieu Picot, to our needs.

I could not but admire the fluency with which a whole imaginary history rolled from my friend's tongue in explanation of our plight—and the details with which he worked it out. How we had tried to row from somewhere on the Isle d'Orleans across to the north shore, and were carried down and upset. Doubting my own command of the patois I said very little, playing the part of a man half-dead from his immersion—but no one seemed to suspect me, and as I caught a glimpse of myself in a looking-glass against the wall I did not wonder.

My wig was still on, but a line of gum on my chin showed where the river had ravished my beard. I admired my comrade's self-possession when he first saw me without that article, which was now tossing on the St. Lawrence, or, who knows puzzling the police force.

The friendly Picot had a roaring fire in a few minutes, and some grog of no innocent intention was served to us. Under ordinary circumstances the stuff would have put me under the table, but now it only served to give me back my sinews. We were at Picot's an hour and got thoroughly warmed, dried and fed, for which service the honest man would have taken no money. But we insisted and paid our score; incidentally I laid in a fresh supply of cartridges, and just as the dawn was breaking, cold and cloudy, we set out again upon what I hoped would be the last stage of the journey.

Picot's house stood on high ground, with a view over the tumbling river, but there was no sign left either of the police-boat or of the 'Né-nuphar!'—Indeed I often have wondered what became of that graceful pleasure-boat. Incongruous in her name and her bright brasses, she must have been about many a dark and secret business and borne many a strange cargo and

desperate crew in her time. Now it was all over—her career as a pirate craft; and I seemed to have a vision of her, dragged woe-begone and white and vanquished, astern of the conquering tug.

CHAPTER XVII

PASQUALINO CONVERSES

As we turned our backs upon Picot's and the St. Lawrence, and faced the wild, new country and the hill-range where the road climbed, a sort of constraint fell between my companion and me. The immediate danger and the need for action had swept from us the feeling caused by our struggle in the Maison de l'Orme, but now in the quiet of our walk this partially returned. It came upon me that I did not even know his name, and yet not only my success in this errand, but my life too, were in his hands.

We trudged in silence for about a mile—the road rising all the time and the dawn brightening behind us, and the result of my reflections at least was to determine that I must find out how he stood affected toward me.

"By-the-way," I said to him carelessly, "we have been too busy since we met to think of it—but do you know I've never heard your name?"

"Oh you can call me Pasquale;" he replied, "that will do as well as any. I am Pasqualino

with the old man, and last names do not count in the mountains."

"Is yours Vettori by any chance?" I asked, at random. But the name had no effect on him; and he shook his head.

"No. I do not know that name," he said, and we walked on a few paces in silence till he took up the question in his turn.

"And you....." he said, "are Gellatly. I remember that. Antonio—was it not?"

"Yes," I replied, "Antonio."

"And a friend of the old man's, I think you said? You want to go to him at once?"

I saw something more of his face than I had done yet for the morning light fell clear on it. It was drawn and white and weary, but there was a lurking humor in the eye. I had to take some risks, so I took them then and there.

"There is a person I would like to see first."

"Oho!" said he, "a lady, perhaps?"

I nodded, feeling a bit nervous as to the result of this confession, but the humor in his eye simply broadened into laughter, and he slapped his thigh.

"Well done, Pasqualino!" he cried out, still laughing, "I saw at first what affair this was, when you landed on my head in the 'Nénuphar'

—I said to myself ‘c’è l’amore!’ And the old man, and the papers, whew! this is worse than St. Lawrence, on my word!”

“Unless you help me,” said I, for I knew nothing else to say. His face grew serious again and he quickened his pace.

“It is the wrong time—my friend, the wrong time!” he explained gravely, gesticulating as he walked.

“As you know things went wrong yonder, and the dogs have got the scent at last. The chief was in a fury when he talked to her last night—and I have not much cheer to bring him though we have thrown them off the track this time. We have lost Dufour too—it is all wrong every way! No time, believe me, for pretty speeches and notes and love making—I would turn back now if I were you.”

“Nevertheless I mean to go on.”

“Oh, these lovers!” he said in Italian and again broke out laughing. “All flames and fury, eh? And no one to help but Pasqualino!”

“Down there in the river there was no one to help but Antonio,” said I, trying to join lightly in his mood.

“Do not think I forget!” he turned proudly upon me, his boy’s face set and stern. “I am

not that kind. I said there as I say now, not one of them would have done it—not one! But I speak as a friend—I warn as a friend, this is not the right day. The Chief is in hard luck and he is not easy at the best of times. Now, when the current runs against us, it is sheer madness to disobey him, and merely for a woman too! He is capable of anything to-day; and what good will it do you to get a bullet in your brain under her window? Better take my advice, and try it later on when all this has blown over.”

“Pasqualino,” I began, “I see you speak as a friend, but you do not understand. M. de Pétry need not trouble about me, for I shall not add to his troubles, unless he tries to keep me from seeing Mademoiselle Marguerite. I have come all this way to see her and to take her away if she will come. You must have known that she was kept there unwillingly.”

“That is true,” said he, “for I myself saw her in tears, and not a day ago. But they said she had been talking—that she had endangered us all.”

“Pooh! A girl—” said I, “what did she know? Depend on it, Pasqualino, that is only an excuse to keep her away from me.”

"But those papers of the Colonel's? " he asked doubtfully, and scratching his head, "You have them still, I suppose?"

"We will talk about those—but first let me tell you how you came to go back for them—and that will show you I speak the truth. He talked with her, did he not—to get her to give up to him a paper like this?"

Pasqualino turned his surprised face toward me.

"That he did—for I heard while on guard at the door. Then he called me....."

"And told you to take the 'Nénuphar' and go back, and get those two scraps, that he might prove to her he had them. Now shall I tell you the truth, Pasqualino? They belong to her, they are part of a legacy, and he has no more title to them than you, my friend."

"It may be," replied he, "but where do you come in, with your revolver?"

"I am trying to save her and hers," I answered earnestly, "Your chief is a great robber, Pasqualino—why should he take everything? These are Mademoiselle's papers and I mean to give them to her."

"You do not give me a light task," said the Italian shaking his head—"What am I to

say to him? You speak very easily of the Chief—but have you ever seen him angry? Suppose I am too friendly to oppose you, Antonio, what excuse can I give for coming empty-handed?”

“It is the easiest thing in the world. Tell him you were interrupted in your search, that the house is watched, which between ourselves is very likely true. Somebody found poor Dufour, remember—and I have an idea that the authorities are not wholly satisfied with the account of his death.”

Pasqualino whistled long and softly. We walked on. The day had fully come in splendid tints of orange and russet on the fringes of dark purple cloud. Our road wandered between thickets of alder, pine and birch, with sumach beginning to show its scarlet in their midst. Great hill-tops rose around us; here and there sounded a cow-bell as the animals came out to pasture. The air was very sweet and pure, and the first rays of the sun warmed us to summer again.

“We are going to some mountain village?” I asked presently.

“It is Bon Ange Gardien,” he replied—“We have only two miles further to go. And what

are we to do when we get there.....!" He finished with a shrug.

"But de Pétry does not live in the village, of course,—” I suggested. "You can stow me away in some house there if you will."

My knowledge of the 'Chief' as he called him, seemed greatly to amuse Pasqualino; he chuckled loud and long.

"You know the old man, don't you?" said he. "Well, well, I am not one to go back on a comrade, although this—mind you, this is no trifling matter! He is not one to be caught without a pistol or to spare the knife....."

"I know that!" I answered grimly.

"And there is not a chance in the world for the three, if he catches us," Pasqualino continued, "you, and her and me....buona notte!"

"You're a good fellow, Pasquale," said I, and gripped him by the hand.

"As to that," he answered me, laughing his reckless laugh, "better the Chief's vengeance than the State's, I say. I was never made for a gaol, sir. Since the thing looks bound to end one way or the other, I make my choice of the first. 'Tis quicker—and he would do it neatly. These policemen are rotten bad shots."

"I believe you will not have to play target,"

said I, "and by-the-way, I've not told you that there is something beyond friendship in all this. Your Chief is not so generous as he might be, eh? Well I've been lucky lately, Pasqualino, and I'll cut my little fortune in half for you, as a remembrance. Five hundred, my friend, for that hour's talk with Marguerite."

His eyes sparkled. "Good!" said he, "your line pays well evidently. What is it, cards? You have the figure for cards I should say."

I gravely assented. (It may be mentioned in parenthesis that I hardly know poker from whist.)

"This smuggling is an ill-paid, dangerous job." He confided in me, "You earn every dollar you get, truly, and those devils of Yankees sleep with an eye open. Cards now, a good railroad line, and a solemn chap like yourself to work it,—that's the game. I could never do cards, I haven't the face. A back window when the family are at dinner is more in my line—or used to be. But the profits are cut in half, now that you have to share with the police."

I commiserated Pasqualino on this state of affairs. He grew expansive and rattled on.

"Between ourselves, the Chief has lost his nerve. We are not what we were three years

ago—then we raked in the cash I can tell you! But he has lost man after man. Your brother, now, no one ever managed a jeweller better—I can see yours is a talented family!”

He paused, but I was too much disturbed by this revelation of the character borne by my gratuitous relative, to reply.

“He was a terrible loss to us. And we had to give up a whole line of business which had paid admirably, when Balsamo went off too. You knew him, perhaps. He gave us all our little prescriptions, such as were needed to carry on the work—his drops to put in a fellow’s beer—no taste and not even a headache when one woke up! To say nothing of his compound for opening a safe. Would you believe it, he never wrote one of them down, so that when he died,—well you can imagine the disgust of the Chief.”

“I rather fancy counterfeiting,” I suggested abstractedly, busy with my own thoughts.

“Counterfeiting—a magnificent trade!” he agreed enthusiastically, “but an expensive outlay—Ah, look sir, there’s Bon Ange Gardien!”

I turned to look where Pasqualino pointed. The road ran in a cleft between two middling-sized hills, and at our right side down the ravine

a mountain torrent gushed. Ahead the hills rose to mountains, and the road vanished and re-appeared rising all the time to where a thin church spire cut the air, with a group of steep-roofed cottages clustered round it. Instinctively we both stopped.

"He may be on the look-out," I suggested, but my companion shook his head.

"His place is further on," he replied, "and he does not often come to the village. Still you are right—it would not do to have *two* seen. Here sir, I have a plan. There is an old hut up on the mountain beyond there—it was used for a goat stable in the winter, but is empty now. I will start you on the path. You shall give me a note for Mademoiselle, and I will try to get it to her. We will arrange a meeting, some time when I am on guard."

This plan seemed feasible, so down I sat by the roadside and scribbled a note to Marguerite. Pasqualino took it, and then hurried me along the road to a point where I could see on the hillside far above the village, the brown roof of the hut. Then he showed me a path in the bushes, and warning me that he might be many hours returning, he set off briskly for Bon Ange Gardien. As for me, I wasted no time, but

started at once up the wood-trail reaching the stable after ten minutes climb. It was a little shed, partly ruinous, one story high save at one end where there was a loft filled with hay. The trees clustered thick about the building, and there was no other path save the half-obliterated goat track. The interior was uninviting, but the loft promised better, and I climbed up there to sink into the hay with a sigh of content. There was a sort of little window in the roof, and I could see above the underbrush and down the hill-side to the rough little village, where the gilt cross on the church shone in the sun. But after looking and listening for an hour, and seeing nothing out of the way in the village, and hearing naught but the chatter of the squirrels, I began to be overpoweringly drowsy and heavy, so gathering the hay around, under and over me, I stretched out and was soon deep asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN WITH THE BADGE

The sun came round into the west and in due time thrust a ray through the chink of my hay-loft which fell on my face and awoke me. I turned over grumbling in the straw, bestuck with it, like Edgar, and sat up blinking at the sun-ray. I had to guess the hour for my watch had resented its bath in the St. Lawrence, and I knew the length of my nap chiefly from the overpowering hunger which beset me. This was so strong and clamorous that I decided to gain the ground at once and hunt for berries with which to appease it until the coming of Pasqualino. But when I looked out of my little window, I saw something which changed my intention and put my hunger at once into the background.

I looked down the hill-side upon the village, the gorge, the distant mountain-range all peaceful in the mellow stillness of this August afternoon. The sun was sinking in a transparent sky, the wind had vanished, sunk to a little

breeze which stirred the alders. It was deliciously warm and promised a golden sunset,—just the day and the hour when a man would climb the hill and sit under a grey pine to smoke his pipe, and yet the sight of him filled me with misgivings.

He was a tall, elderly man, pale-faced and sharp-featured, and wearing a short, scanty beard. His hat lay on the ground beside him, and thus I saw he was bald. He wore a Norfolk jacket, heavy whipcord breeches, and dusty leather leggins. Steadily he smoked, looking out over the sunset;—and I had a sudden indefinite impression that I had seen him before. At all events, I did not feel inclined to emerge from the goat-stable while he was there, but possessed my soul in patience and waited for him to finish his smoke and move on. He was most deliberate, and I grew more and more impatient as I crouched there watching him turn his head and knock the ashes out of his pipe. By and by he took out a pocket-book, unfolded some papers from it and studied them with attention, his pipe clinched between his teeth. Then he put them away and began systematically to examine the workings of a series of objects which he took from the pockets of his

jacket. The first of these was a revolver, one about the size of my own. He wiped the barrel scrupulously with his handkerchief and opened the chamber. Then he weighed in his hand and shook back and forth in the air a short black club with a handle, which had an ugly look. Thirdly, (can you picture my whitened face peering out at this, or imagine the chill which crept over me?) he slipped out of an inner pocket a little intricate tangle of bright steel chains and bars that worked with a snap, and he clicked this on his left wrist one or twice. And when he unbuttoned his jacket to replace it, I caught a glimpse of a round metal badge fastened to his waistcoat.

I had no curiosity as to what this machine might be. I was not even surprised when the man turned his head toward the loft, and my vague impression became definite that he was no other than the early pedestrian I had met, the morning I escaped from the Maison de l'Orme to get my mail. My interest in him was swallowed up in a sudden anxiety and terror for my unconscious ally Pasqualino. It was not wise perhaps, and certainly not pleasant to be moving against the law in this way, but I had taken an honest liking for the Italian—I knew

him to be risking a great deal in my service at that moment, and here looked to be a deadly ambushade in waiting for his return. How was I to warn him, what was to be done? The man under the tree commanded a full view of the only issue to the goat-stable—I could not possibly get away from it unseen, and moreover I had not the faintest idea from which direction Pasqualino would come. The only thing to do was to lie and shiver in the hay, and pray that the Italian would not make his appearance until after dark, although I had no reason to suppose from the stranger's actions that the arrival of night was going to drive him away.

I think the worst hours in the whole business of the Quincunx, were those I spent waiting and cursing and gnawing the hay, in the loft of the goat-stable above Bon Ange Gardien. It grew dusk and I could hardly distinguish his seated figure; it grew dark and I saw only the red spark of his pipe, and I buckled my belt tighter, like the Indians, as the moments crept on. Then I think, I must have dozed, for when I looked out again the spark had vanished, the man was gone, and ten minutes after that Pasqualino came.

I heard his voice calling softly, "Antonio! Are you there? Antonio!"

"I'm up here in the hay," I returned crawling out and preparing to descend.

"I have a message for you," he said. "Mio Dio! But I am glad you are safe—and you are famished, no doubt."

"Starving!" said I as I dropped to the ground and snatched the hunch of bread he held out to me.

"I wish I had more for you," said Pasqualino regretfully as he saw me set my teeth in it, "but I could not get anything else without running risks."

"Oh this will do till my work is over, particularly if you bring me an appointment."

"You are to come with me now;" said he, "it is as good a chance as you are likely to have at any time. I am on guard, while the Chief has gone down to Bon Ange Gardien. But he will be back by ten o'clock so we must not lose time."

"And Marguerite?"

"I have contrived a way that she can speak to you through a barred window. She cannot get out, he is too clever for that, but perhaps you and she can arrange something."

"And I also have seen," I remarked finishing my bread, "something which I think you ought to know, my friend."

I told Pasqualino about the man with the badge then and there, and I could hear him whistle in reply.

"It does not look good for the Chief, nor for any of us for that matter," he said shaking his head, "However, we don't help matters by staying here, and we have a rough walk ahead of us. Are you ready?"

I nodded, admiring his coolness in the face of what he must have seen was a pressing danger, and we set off forthwith from the goat-stable, Pasqualino leading.

The building, as I have said, stood on a spur of the mountain above the village, concealed in the thick undergrowth which covered the slopes. Through this undergrowth the Italian plunged, guided by a track which I confess I, myself, was unable to see. The night was absolutely clear and brilliant with stars, but the woods were sombre enough, and more than once I begged Pasqualino to light the lantern I saw he carried.

"Not here, this is easy enough, and it might be seen," he replied, striking through what looked to me a pathless thicket of blackberry. "The way grows harder presently, and then we will need the light."

Our path led on a level for a time, evidently around the shoulders of the mountain; then we began to go up, climbing shelves of rock, scaling low cliffs, scrambling over the scrabble and loose boulders. We rose and rose and the trees dwindled and the light grew clearer as we gained the heights, but at best the business was not easy, and I, myself, was hopelessly at sea as to where we were. Of course I realized that we were going the long way round to the Colonel's hiding-place in order to avoid the village. After ten minutes on the open we turned again into cover, but this time through a wood of larger trees and by a well-defined path. As we walked the noise of falling water reached my ears, and each turn brought us nearer, until finally we emerged upon the very edge of the cleft down which plunged the cascade. The open and star-lit sky looked down here upon the white foam of water hurrying to the brink, and the spray of the fall mounted to our faces. Here Pasqualino condescended to light his lantern, and skirmished the brink of the stream for a few minutes in search of something. This when found proved to be an end of cord the length of which was concealed in the stream.

"Come and help," said Pasqualino with a grin, "and you shall see our draw-bridge."

Lending my aid to the cord, we soon pulled in a heavier rope, and then a construction, heavier still, began to unwind itself from a tree on the opposite side of the stream. Slowly, with creaks and jerks, we drew into place a narrow suspension bridge formed of shingles fastened to rope cables, and held into position by a system of pulleys, on either bank. Pasqualino fastened this rope firmly remarking:

“We will leave the bridge up, for we may need it, you know!” and then, mounting a tree-trunk to reach the proper level, he crossed like a monkey, and called to me from the other side. I was frank in thinking that I hoped we might not need that bridge again. It hung, swaying to my weight, over the very curve of the cataract, and shrouded in the boiling clouds of mist. The guard-rope was slippery and damp, the shingles like glass; the spray shut off my view, the roar of the falling water confused my head, already shaky from lack of food. I was horribly nervous and unsure, and I thought every minute to drop helpless into the fall beneath; but somehow I stuck on, though my forehead was wet with perspiration when I reached the further bank. No time for rest, however; my guide was in a hurry. Lantern

in hand he dashed through the woods, and I stumbled and fell and arose and stumbled again in his rear. I had just almost decided that at all hazards I *must* rest, when Pasqualino suddenly stopped, lowered his lantern and looked cautiously about him.

We stood in a clearing, and in front of us was a small log-cabin, with a steep roof shading deep porches. Flowers grew here, and I noted a hammock; the place had quite the appearance of a summer camp. Like everything that had to do with M. de Pétry the exterior was more than usually peaceful and innocent, and yet, what a place of incarceration! How helpless must that unfortunate girl be here!

"Wait!" whispered my guide, and he glided away in the shadow, hiding the lantern under his coat. I saw him disappear round a corner, and then, an instant later, the lantern was waved from the piazza. I mounted the steps, and we spoke together for a moment.

"Listen," I whispered him, "if I should see that man again or notice anything suspicious I will fire my revolver twice quickly. If you hear it, run! . . . When does he return?"

"He told me ten—it is just nine," said Pasqualino, "I will stay out of ear-shot—good luck, brother!"

"One minute," I called as he turned away, and without stopping to count I thrust a roll of greenbacks into his hand. I had a feeling that when Pasqualino and I met again we might not have time for such formalities.

He wrung me by the hand, and then he left me standing before a window of which he had raised the sash, but not the shade. Heavy iron bars crossed it. I knocked once with my finger. A step sounded within and the shade was quietly drawn up.

"Is it you, Mr. Adrian?" said Marguerite's voice. The lamp-light within let me see the simple interior of the camp—a square small room, the barred windows, even the fire-place barred also. Marguerite stood there, dressed all in black, her face and voice wholly lacking that sullen stolidity I remembered, but tremulous and strained, her eyes full of sorrow and terror, and her tones of gratitude and fear.

"I am sorry I have been so long coming, Mademoiselle," I said as I leaned exhausted against the window.

"Poor Mr. Adrian, how tired you look!" she cried compassionately, "Glad as I am you have come, I fear it has been at too great a cost—you look utterly worn-out! Let me get you a glass of wine!"

I could only nod in reply. She left the window and returned with a decanter of sherry, and a glass.

"This is M. de Pétry's—you have tasted it before," said she. "Do not speak until you have taken it."

The wine revived me wonderfully; I returned the glass, remembering our time was short.

"The first thing to decide is how to get you out," I said. "We must plan that at once."

She shook her head. "I am afraid it is impossible," she answered quietly. "I have thought over every method. And even if I escaped, where could I go? What could I do? Sooner or later he would find me again."

"Was it for warning me?" I asked.

"Not wholly," said Marguerite evasively. "He too wanted the Quincunx."

The name recalled to me my errand. I began hurriedly to explain.

"We have only a moment, Mademoiselle. You know who I am now, why I came to the Maison de l'Orme, how ignorant I was of all its darker secrets. You must understand about the Quincunx; there were five parts as I supposed, but to whom were they confided? Can you give me any clue?"

"I have thought it all out, Mr. Adrian, since I first was shut up here. From what he said, from what you told me, I think I begin to understand. But, oh it seems the more impossible!"

"Nevertheless, tell me!" I urged and leant nearer.

"It all comes back to *him*," she went on lowering her tone. "Number Three, I think, my father gave him when they were friends. That seems odd too, because later I know they were enemies, so he must have given that one long before the others. Don't you think that strange?"

"Oh, I cannot tell," said I, for my head spun with the tangle of it. "Go on to the others—number One?"

"My mother—" she faltered, "and that I am sure he got."

"Ah!" said I, "and number Two to Chavagnac?"

"To poor, poor Dufour," she repeated, "and number Five to Gellatly, the one who died."

"And number Four?" I asked seeing my hopes slip away. "Have you number Four?"

"I had," said Marguerite, "up to this last spring. Then it was stolen from me, Mr. Adrian, and I have never seen it since."

"By *him*," said I between my teeth. But to this Marguerite did not agree.

"I have always thought so," said she, "till he brought me here. Since then he has sworn it was not so and tried to make me give it to him as if I had it. Yet he says it is the last number he lacks, so that I do not know what to think."

There fell a pause; the trees stirred in the wind, my head ached and rang and I could not clear my thoughts. I went dully over the circle. Number Three to de Pétry, number Two to Chavaignac, number One to Marianna Balsamo,—these now, by what a series of circumstances were safe in my pocket. To get number Four and number Five I saw no chance, although the first I believed de Pétry must have. Then Dufour's death—the police must have been watching him since then, and I was so placed that it was unlikely they would put themselves out to assist *me*.—And how to help Marguerite—to avoid betraying Pasqualino—or to save my own life even? At this point I laughed almost wildly, and I saw the girl shrink terrified at the sound.

"It's all very bad, Mademoiselle," I apologized, "and I'm not quick of resource to-night. But the vital question is yourself."

"Oh no! no!" protested Marguerite turning her white face toward me, "that is not the vital question! Just now I—I am alarmed for your safety, Mr. Adrian, far more than for my own. I am not so frightened as I was. He will not hurt me I think, only keep me here awhile."

"Which is bad enough, God knows!"

"Not terrible—not so bad as I feared—believe me. Oh if there was a chance of escape I would take it—you know that, but there is not a crack. And he keeps the keys himself always, night and day, he does not trust Pasqualino."

"And there is nobody to protest, to call upon!" I cried in indignation.

"There is nobody; he is all powerful."

I seemed to see what she meant, and for the first time to understand what this girl's life had been. How terror-ridden and how helpless must these past months have seemed to her!

"Mr. Adrian you ought not to stay here, you must go," she continued regaining firmness of tone and manner. "I thank you for your kindness, for your offers of help, but believe me, you run more actual danger than I. Toward you he will be perfectly ruthless, but he will not kill me now, I think."

Again I was seized with an hysterical impulse to laugh, hearing her say such words.

"What am I to do, Mademoiselle?"

"Go back at once!" she insisted.

"Leaving you here in this man's hands?"

"Indeed I do not think he will hurt me. And after all," she added in a lower tone, "what does it matter? It can only end one way!"

There was a note of despair in her voice which chilled me. I patted her shoulder through the bars. "He has terrified you for years?" I asked.

"Oh don't, don't speak of it, don't question me!" she broke out. "You only make it worse! There you see! Thank you " she went on brokenly fighting for calmness once more—"I am nervous upset, and a great deal of this some day perhaps you will hear it all, Mr. Adrian, meanwhile please go! I am made much worse by your staying!"

But I still lingered, helplessly. Suddenly in uncontrollable terror she beat the iron bars.

"Oh I hear him coming—Oh go! go! go!" she cried, and in the pause I could also hear, quite plainly, a steady footfall mounting the rocky path.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STAIN ON NUMBER FIVE

Before I had time to speak, she pulled the shade down and the sash. I heard her cross the room within, and then silence fell again, with the distant footstep mounting steadily, steadily nearer. But I stood my ground. An idea had come to me, irresistibly born of the conversation and pointing only one way. If I could parley with him, if he did not settle with me in the first instant, we might drive a bargain. I had three numbers of the Quincunx, with which I might purchase Marguerite's freedom. At least I felt that I must try.

During the last month I had brushed elbows more than once with sudden death; we had been point to point, as it were, like antagonists at fencing when I also had my chance. Now I must stand there in the open and wait for him, counting the seconds which drew him nearer, as in all probability the last of my life. True, I had my revolver, but from our relative positions he could not fail to see me first, so that

weapon gave me little confidence. I was very cold, for some reason, and shivered from head to foot as I stood, my eyes strained toward the wood-path, almost as if I expected to see some horrible and deadly monster issue forth. Once I lost the foot-step—surely, he lingered on the way?—no, there it was again and approaching fast. How intolerably long the instants now! My mouth was parched, and the thought in my mind was Cecil, Cecil, Cecil!.....

If you had told me I should have to *call* to him, I could never have done it—! He was deep in thought and did not notice me at all, as his fine active figure brushed with the dew of the woods came rapidly up toward the house. The voice with which I called him I should never have recognized for my own.

“M. de Pétry!”

He stopped, and threw up his head; his hand flashed to his pocket. I held out my revolver, uncocked, muzzle downward.

“You see—it’s truce!” I remarked. He did not lower his arm.

“For you, perhaps!” he said with an ugly laugh—“Mr. Gellatly—Adrian!”

I do not know why, but at his voice my blood again began to circulate.

"For you too, if you are wise!" I retorted, "M. de Pétry de Chambord—Vettori!"

"What do you mean by this?" he cried roughly, striding up to me pistol in hand, "I give you one moment to explain yourself before I blow your brains out!"

"It is all I need," I said composedly as I could, "and my spirit no doubt will take pleasure in the fact that your shot cannot fail of being heard by the detectives who have been lurking about here all day!"

He did not start, but I saw his eye search me.

"I suppose that's a bluff," he sneered, ".... On my word I don't understand the part you are playing!"

"On the contrary it's the truth," I said, "I leave you to judge if an enemy would have waited here to tell it to you."

This time he lowered his weapon.

"Will you kindly tell me, Adrian, what you mean, and what you want?" said he, quite in his usual tone.

"I'm only waiting the opportunity," said I, with a reaction to positive jauntiness. "I want nothing but Balsamo's Formula."

He smiled and shook his head. "I'd like that myself," said he.

"I know you've part at least," I went on—
"I don't know how you know it—for I haven't," said he.

"And Chavaignac gave me his—" I told him.

"Chavaignac—what nonsense!"

"Yes, I know you searched him thoroughly—but you see he had already given it to me." I put this all together in one breath and I saw his face change.

"You see my uncle, Mr. Adrian, is waiting," I explained.

"So is the Jones Leather Company," said de Pétry savagely.

"Ah, but you're at a disadvantage," I told him, growing encouraged by having got thus far. "It's hard for you to handle such a negotiation, for obvious reasons. That fellow with the badge down in the village is one."

"That was true, eh?" he asked. I nodded.

"You see when we parted," I proceeded, "after my charming visit, I was unable to explain. Now I may tell you frankly that I don't consider your private affairs any concern whatever of mine. I am quite willing to forget them all—all—" I waved my hand, "if we can arrange between us this business of the formula, and one other."

"Marguerite?" he asked.

"You are a delight in conversation, Colonel, as always:" and I bowed.

"'Pon my soul, I believe you're in love with the girl!" he said with a hearty laugh.

"I wish her set at liberty," I answered firmly.

"And that's all?" he questioned.

"That and the Formula," said I, meaning in this way to find out what he really had, keeping my own possessions to use as a last resort, "which is as nothing when you consider that in return you can eliminate....."

I did not finish. A hand, firm and compelling was laid upon my wrist. It belonged to a totally strange man of unprepossessing appearance who had come quietly out of the woods and up to my side. I looked from this person to the Colonel, and there in the same relative position and holding a lantern, stood the man with the badge.

"You're wanted, Colonel," said he.

"Who are you, sir, and what do you mean by this?" blustered de Pétry, in his most military and thunderous voice.

"Gently with the pistol, Colonel!" said the other taking it from him. "There are more of us, so you'd better come quietly."

"Come quietly? Come where? And why should I not be quiet?" said de Pétry, and, on my word, I should have believed him, "I suppose I have a right to see the warrant for this tomfoolery, and know what it is all about?"

"Oh yes!" said the man with the badge very soothingly, "I can tell you that. There's more than one charge, but this will do. Parties would like to know what has happened to a young Yankee gentleman who's been missing for a fortnight, and was last seen in your house. Name of Adrian, I believe."

It was the last name de Pétry or I expected to hear. He broke the pause of genuine astonishment.

"This is too ridiculous—" said he, "Why that is Mr. Adrian!" and he indicated me. Both the detectives laughed.

"Very quick and smart indeed!" chuckled the man with the badge, "only we have a description you see, and the party was a *gentleman*, and blond. No, no, Colonel, we know this Italian chap, and it's nothing romantic they want *him* for, no, not by a long chalk!"

"Just one moment—" de Pétry said, turning to me where I stood, blinking at him. I remember so vividly the turn of his handsome head,

the calm, erect poise, the quiet manner, and the evidently disturbing effect which these gentlemanlike qualities produced upon our captors. During all of our first uninterrupted conversation, I had seen that the Colonel held in his left hand an ordinary pocket letter-case. He had not even troubled to put it away while threatening me with the revolver, and at this moment it was still in his grasp. Now however, he glanced at it, opened it with dexterous fingers and produced therefrom a small square piece of parchment curiously folded, and marked with a number. This he handed to me, with a smile and a slight bow.

"I think that is what you wanted, Mr. Adrian?" said he.

The reader of course can easily guess what it was, and that I bent eagerly toward the light to examine it. But the number was not what I expected. It was a 5, and disfigured moreover by an irregular brown stain which blotched the surface of the parchment; I tapped this with my finger.

"My namesake?" I enquired.

De Pétry gave the faintest shrug. "A foolish fellow!" he commented in his suave voice, and I knew at once how the first Anthony Gellatly

had died. Still I could not forget what I had asserted to the Colonel ten minutes before, and I turned to the detective who had been watching the transaction with curiosity.

"I am really Philip Adrian," I assured him, and thereupon pulled off my wig, and let the lantern-light show full upon my face and my light hair. The man in astonishment but still suspicious leaned forward, and as he had hoped, this gave de Pétry a chance.

What passed was swift and indefinite. I was conscious chiefly of the officer gripping my arm. An instant's struggle, two sharp reports from the pistol, the detective staggering back yet not hurt; a plunge and crackle in the near-by undergrowth, the sound of running feet in the woods, and then of feet in pursuit; and through it all the piercing, shrill note of a whistle blown for aid. An intolerable, prolonged sound this, which seemed to torture me worse than all the rest put together.

I had made no effort to move, although my constable clung to me as though I had. The woods now were full of running, and men's voices calling, and flickering lights. I kept putting my hand to my head, and repeating over and over to the officer, "I am Philip Adrian, I

shall not run, I will stay here, you need not grip me so hard—!" and all the time the scene, and the lights, the voices, and the knowledge of the girl crouching there in the house, took on a morbid acuteness. But the pursuers drew away, the noise grew fainter, the lights vanished. There was a second or two of absolute midnight stillness under the stars, for the silent officer and me.

Then again clamor welled up, more fiercely although more distant, and it rose swiftly to a climax in one cry,—one long scream, agonized, fearful, despairing, and at this, the whole forest seemed to gather itself up to descend upon me, and I do not know what followed.

CHAPTER XX

THE QUESTION OF NUMBER FOUR

"It is Mr. Philip Adrian—it is positively!"

"Then what in the name of.....what, I mean, has he been doing with himself. Look at him!"

"He came to let me out for one thing. Oh, poor fellow!"

"So you were shut up here, miss?....Well, but I don't understand yet....."

"You can't now—wait till I get him something—I think he's coming round!"

This conversation seemed to reach me, as through thick smoke, in the voices of the officer and Marguerite. I opened my eyes; they rested on the untrimmed birch beams of the camp ceiling. Thence I turned them to a bright fire which crackled beside my sofa, and, more gratefully, to the face of Marguerite Balsamo who bent over me. With excellent sense, she began giving me spoonfuls of strong broth.

"Who screamed? Who was hurt?" I asked her when I could speak. She turned her head

shudderingly toward a corner of the room, and as I painfully raised myself and followed her glance, I saw the man with the badge standing above something which lay on the floor prone, and limp and crumpled, with no likeness to a man, save the clothes. De Pétry had fallen from the hanging bridge, while running across. The stream itself need not have been dangerous, for the torrent was narrow and swept directly into a pool where a swimmer had every chance, but the man, heavy built as he was, pitched on his head upon the rocks. His neck was broken; he was dead by the time his pursuers came up. This much was told me in a few sentences.

There followed a discussion as what was to be done. The officers had no shadow of excuse to detain Marguerite, but although I could see I had practically convinced them as to my identity, yet they dared not lose sight of me until it was confirmed by higher authority. Personally I was indifferent, so long as I was not asked to move. The long nervous strain preceding this crisis, then the excitement, my immersion in the river, the day in damp clothes without food—all these had culminated in a sort of prostration. I was weak, sick and giddy, with a slight fever, and quite unable to get so far as

Bon Ange Gardien. The camp had only one small alcove as a bed-chamber, and this Marguerite positively refused to take, alleging that my condition needed watching. I refused to move from the sofa, so the officers finally agreed to take turns in keeping guard on us, although it was plain they regarded the necessity as purely technical. I was covered up on my sofa, the detective nodded in a corner, and Marguerite sat opposite the fire in a big chair. Once as she moved about near me, I was able to murmur, "Pasqualino?" and was relieved to gather from her answer that he had taken the two shots for a warning and by now was far away.

We talked together in low voices for an hour or two. What she let me see during that conversation, what I came to understand of her life, her terrors and her own soul, I hold sacred—I have never repeated it even to my wife. In the recollection the pity of it sometimes touches me still. By and by however, I grew quieter, and our talk died out. I lay watching the flames flicker down; she sat quite still, shading her drawn, white, passionate face in the hollow of her hand. The officer in the corner was asleep over that lax, inhuman heap. So she,

and I, and the dead man kept that night's vigil.

In the morning after a substantial breakfast, I felt strong enough to crawl down to the village. We must have been an odd procession, the officers, carrying the dead man, while the girl aided me—. At Bon Ange Gardien we went to the Presbytère; the good, bewildered priests there hurried about and got horses to take us to the nearest railway station. The officers were to carry me, and what remained of de Pétry back to Quebec; but Marguerite proposed, so she told me very quietly, to go to Ste. Anne for a time. She had a friend there, she said.

“And afterwards?” I asked, profoundly moved with pity for her, “What is to become of you Mademoiselle?”

“Oh afterwards—” she answered turning aside her face, “there is always the Convent, where I went to school. And—I have one relative living you know.”

I judged she referred to her mother, and I made no answer. We were standing in the little neat garden of the Presbytère, still bright with late flowers. The gilded cross on the low grey building shone in the sun, and I caught myself staring at it in a kind of daze. It all

seemed so quiet, so simple and pastoral, this landscape, after what had passed! We moved involuntarily down the path, and then Marguerite turned and gave me her hand.

“Good-bye, Mr. Adrian,” she said a little formally. “I have not been able to thank you for what you did—but then I am a dumb sort of creature. I wish there was something I could do in return!”

“In return for what, Mademoiselle?”

“For your kindness, and the dangers you ran, and your sufferings,” she answered, “For instance, you have not all of the Formula, even now. Can I not use my influence, such as it is, with the one person you know of to help you get the lost paper? She might know, or at least might put you on the track.”

“That would help me indeed,” I assented gratefully.

“It shall be done,” said Marguerite. “And now again, good-bye!”

“But why not *au-revoir*?” I said, for I was honestly interested in her. She shook her head.

“These things leave always a cloud—a stain—” she said, not bitterly, though very sadly, “However innocent, I have been the associate of criminals, mixed up in their affairs—no!

You see quite plainly that our paths part here. I wish you a prosperous and honorable career, Mr. Adrian, and a long and happy life. You deserve it, I'm sure."

"I hate to let you drop out of sight like this," I cried impulsively, "after all that has happened."

She turned, and for the first time gave me a long and steady look, a look from the depths of herself. Her eyes had brightened, but again they clouded, and her face once more settled into its old reserve.

"I think it is better so," she said at last, "Good-luck and good-bye, Mr. Adrian." And without turning, she walked quickly out of the gate and down the road. I stood where she had left me, conscious of a certain constraint. That last steady gaze of hers had raised an unwilling embarrassment, a suggestion that I had been somehow disloyal to Cecil. It is not a thought a man relishes, and it changed the tendency of my feeling. I had been very, very sorry to say farewell to Marguerite Balsamo, but now, as I watched her out of sight, my dominant sensation was one of relief.

When my identity had been once established and I had told what I knew to the police, I was

quite free to go where I would. This should have been home at once had I been well enough, but my nerves had gone to pieces temporarily, and the Doctor would not let me leave the Frontenac for the present. I had to write my mother and Uncle Adrian, (who had been agitating Canada generally over my disappearance) of my partial success, and then I had simply to rest for a few days. From Cecil there was not a word.

The third day from the tragedy at Bon Ange Gardien a letter postmarked Montreal was handed me. It read as follows:— I translate from the French.

“DEAR MR. ADRIAN—for I believe that is the name of our late kind guest—I have learned only by the newspapers of the death, stupendous and terrifying, of my Papa bien-aimé. In the midst of my natural prostration, what do I find?—that the police, with too much of zeal, are searching for me, daughter innocent and sorrowful of that maligned character. My sensitive delicacy shrinks at the possibility of publicity in my grief. I pray you, dear Mr. Adrian, in the name of hospitality, if not of some tenderer emotion, (for we were very close in those days, were we not?) use your influence to stop this persecution and allow me to retain

my liberty, and in privacy to shed my tears. It is Marguerite of course, ungrateful girl, who has brought about this *éclaircissement*, and evidently, your penchant for her is known to the authorities!—I enclose a paper which accidentally fell into my hands last spring, and which I gather you are anxious to procure. Papa never suspected I had it, as I thought it prudent to say nothing, for with dear Papa, no one ever knew what might happen. I rely on your chivalry, Monsieur, and beg you to receive the assurance of my consideration the most distinguished.

CLAIRE."

The enclosure had fallen to the floor. Mechanically I stooped to pick it up, but even when I held and saw it with my own eyes, I could hardly bring myself to believe that Claire had all the time been the possessor of number Four.

It was the night of the tenth of August, when I left the train at Ashuelot, my papers in my pocket. You might think me exultant over my good fortune, my success, going proudly to Uncle Adrian, the five numbers in my possession,—those five scraps which had led indirectly at least, to two deaths, if not a third; which had been stolen and restored, yielded up by fear, extorted at the pistol-point, and sold for the

price of a chance for liberty! There was much in their history which I did not even yet entirely understand, for it was not until a fortnight later that I received the narrative which serves to make clear my own. At that instant, as I dismissed the station-wagon, choosing to walk up to the house, there was not a thought which need have clouded my real achievement. Yet I have never been more depressed in my life.

The night was very warm, as I slowly climbed the hill. The Works' long windows glowed, the sound of their machinery clacked and hummed. It was useless for me to pretend any longer that I had been led by the wish to assist Uncle Adrian to heap fortune upon fortune. In my present mood, so great was my dislike and distaste for those five parts of the Formula, that I was inclined to give over our agreement and never touch money, for which it seemed to me, men had so dreadfully schemed, quarrelled, betrayed one another and died. All that had passed in the last two months had simply added to the feelings with which I had left this place, so that my impulse became stronger to take an independent course; to see Cecil, to find if I might hope, and if not, to throw Uncle Adrian's agreement gladly in

the fire. My nerves were not yet quite firm, and I longed to be rid of the whole.

I was some hours in advance of the time which I had set for arriving, and the sense of nervous tension made me loiter and delay. Who knew how Cecil would welcome me? At the crossroads I hesitated again, and the fancy seized me to take one more look at Balsamo's cottage, the starting-point of all.

In five minutes more I stood there, at the gate. Silent and ruined it stood, hiding its secrets and yet never the same to me henceforward. I turned aside and went toward the old oak where she and I had listened to the first account of Balsamo. Full of my own thoughts I went, my eyes on the ground, and bowed my head under the spreading branches. Cecil Adrian rose from the root where she had been sitting, and stood before me.

"You!" was all I could articulate.

"I recognized you at once," she said, and I could not read her voice, "when you stood there by the gate. I saw at once who it was!"

"But what are you doing here?" I cried out, coming nearer. Her hand was very cold, and she tried to withdraw it.

"Why I—" she faltered, uncertainly, "I suppose—I am—waiting!—"

CHAPTER XXI

THE SECOND ACCOUNT OF BALSAMO

(In a letter to Philip Adrian.)

MY DEAR MR. ADRIAN :—

The arguments which have been used to induce me to send you this account have unquestionably carried with them a power of menace. Personally I had hoped that my sincere repentance and sacred calling were enough protection from the outside world, and that I might be allowed to finish in peace and hope a life which has had more than its share of storm. But such evidently is not to be the case. You have been represented to me as the friend and helper of my daughter, and although the convent does not recognize that tie, yet I must still do so in my heart. Moreover, my own conversation with you on one occasion, was enough to show me that you possessed (*how*, I am still puzzling to discover) a very full knowledge of all the outside events of my late husband's life. That you should be in a position to demand the cause and reason for these is not therefore strange, and you hold my present peace too firmly in your grasp for me to disregard the request. I had fancied you more generous, but let that

pass. I will comply fully as possible with your wish, stipulating only in return that I may be allowed to pass what remains of my life undisturbed, in prayers for the living as for the dead. Truly, I send this to you realizing that I put a dreadful weapon into your hand, but be charitable in your thoughts to a woman, who, whatever her faults, has certainly suffered and expiated them in the utmost bitterness.

I was born on the Island of Martinique, and at the age of fifteen went to Paris to complete my education, and try for a position which would in some sort relieve my parents from the expense of keeping me. My father, who went with me, succumbed to the change of climate before I had finished my seventeenth year. My mother, who had a number of younger children, could not leave her island home, and I was therefore forced to enter upon life unprotected and at a dangerous age. I was good-looking, and I was proud; I had all the fancy for luxury and gaiety which is natural to every young girl. The only road open to me to attain these was marriage so soon as possible, and this I quickly had to recognize by meeting a man named Joseph Balsamo some fifteen or twenty years older than myself, who made proposals to me almost immediately.

Balsamo had drifted to Paris in his vague and eccentric fashion, in search of the success which to his talents and visionary enthusiasms

lay always just ahead. He seemed to my inexperienced gaze to be rich; I believed him to be kind. No other solution offered to my problem, and I became his wife. Do not judge me too harshly; it was an act for which I was sufficiently punished. We remained in Paris for two years, and when my little girl was old enough to take the voyage, we set sail for America, my husband's head more full of golden projects than his purse of coin. I had never loved him; I was by this time convinced that he was a weak and vicious if not a hopelessly bad man, as well as one who would never make good commercial use of his talents, yet I had no choice but to follow.

It was on the steamer that we first made the acquaintance of the man whom you have known as Horace de Pétry de Chambord. He passed at that time under his Italian mother's name of Vettori. His history I never completely knew, but its salient points are soon told. He had run through his patrimony while in the French Army, and had dissipated a second fortune brought him by his wife. At this time he was a widower; his only child in a convent; his ostensible position the agent of a company of foreign wines. A man of forty, wide in his experience, handsome and manly in appearance, and with a manner mingling kindness and verve—he had in my eyes all the charm which was lacking in the unkempt, eccentric and excitable Balsamo.

Remember, Monsieur, the situation of a woman of my temperament, thirsting for success, ease, pleasure, tied to a man whose tenth of genius only showed more plainly his nine-tenths of folly. Remember, you who passed some weeks under his roof, the charm, the cultivation, the sympathy and the fire of the deceiver, and you will not perhaps condemn me utterly.

The situation on landing in America soon became defined. My husband went to the Adrian Leather Works to submit his projects to the manufacturer; I remained behind in Boston with my little girl, practically under the protection of Vettori.

It was during these months that I was made acquainted with some of his practices and resources. He was not a man of a double life, but of a hundred lives. Clever, ingenious to the last degree, wary and audacious in turn, having always the inestimable advantage of his personal charm, he was really a noteworthy criminal, an extraordinary personality. His associates were men skilled in illegal acts, and delighted to share the profits with one whose ingenuity served both to help and protect them. Chief among these was a man named Gellatly; Chavaignac was another; later the young Italian Pasquale joined them. To this number however, (entirely unsuspected on my part) Vettori soon added my unhappy husband.

I have been too much, and for too long a dupe,

Monsieur, to recall quite clearly when my deception began. But I suspect now that even in the very beginning Vettori regarded my husband's confidence as more important than my love. I suspect that if chance had not made it easy, he would never have sacrificed the first to obtain the last. But he had not to make the choice, and it was ever his weakness to be 'homme à bonnes fortunes.' All the time I lived with him in Boston, he was my husband's close friend and confidant, and held these two relations apart so easily that neither suspected the other. But when Balsamo wrote me finally that his position was permanent and he could give me a home, then the truth was shown in part for Vettori urged me to go. Jealous and angry as I was, his influence over me was complete, and I did as he bade me. Life at Balsamo's cottage was intolerable, however, and I soon made a pretext to move to the little town some miles away, and set up there as a dressmaker. My husband's work absorbed him; he was indifferent as to what I did, so long as he could see little Marguerite when he wished. I was extravagant, and Balsamo supplied me liberally with money, money which I have since had reason to believe, he drew as his share of Vettori's criminal operations, contributing his aid wherever chemistry could furnish it.

It is too long ago, Monsieur, for you to remember the astonishing number of persons

drugged and robbed during that time, or the burglaries committed by the use of an explosive powder more powerful and more certain than dynamite. I have every reason to believe that Balsamo furnished the means, and Vettori the agents for these crimes, although of course I shall never know all the details.

For a long time indeed, I lost sight of my lover, until one fatal morning when he walked in person into my little parlor. Imagine my feelings when he told me that he was a member of Mr. Adrian's house-party under his real name of du Caylus. When he had quieted my jealousy (for I had heard of Mr. Adrian's pretty daughter) he finally came to the real point.

He had made, it appears, earlier in the year, a bargain with my husband to share in the probable profits of the formula, on which Balsamo was experimenting for his employer. It was Vettori who urged the chemist to delay closing the matter with his patron, and meanwhile, to try to make better terms elsewhere. He had now reason to believe the discovery existed but Balsamo was distrustful, and would give him no copy. His object therefore was to try and get it, through me, and using his power, he soon gained my consent.

The task was not easy, for my husband was violently suspicious of everybody, and only really anxious that his daughter should be bene-

fited. I urged and persuaded as best I could, but it was only after an interview with Mr. Adrian when he saw that no further advances could be expected from that quarter, that Balsamo apparently consented. He gave me a small envelope, which I took at once to my lover, but as you know already it held but a portion of the Formula. When I reproached my husband for his want of faith, he replied that his secret was menaced, that he had reason to fear treachery, and so had taken means to hide it. Of course, we searched everywhere but to no purpose. Later on, an accident led me to think that a copy might be in the possession of Gellatly, one of Vettori's lieutenants. On Gellatly's death, which occurred soon after, Vettori found, he told me, another portion. I enquired of my daughter at her school, but if she had another slip she kept it to herself. We were forced to the conclusion that Balsamo carried the rest on his person, and matters rested there.

My narrative has now come to the eventful week, when du Caylus or Vettori was visiting the Adrians. What precipitated the crisis I never precisely knew, but I have always suspected Marguerite of putting her father on the track. However this may be, I know only that one morning Balsamo rushed in to me, and declared his full knowledge of my infidelity. His fury against Vettori was that of a madman. It carried him once more to Mr. Adrian to whom

he must have made a frantic appeal for money, to free him from the toils of his enemy. This appeal failed utterly, and the chemist became desperate. He resolved to break with Vettori in a final interview.

The hour was arranged for late that night. Vettori or du Caylus pleaded a headache and retired early to his room. My information of what happened comes from him of course, but I know him now, and I note his care that Balsamo should come to him, and not he go to Balsamo. In plainer words, I believe he had already resolved upon what afterwards occurred.

A violent dialogue took place between the two men, which ended in a shot from Vettori's revolver. Balsamo pitched over dead, his own pistol exploding in the fall, to be heard also by the dancers below.

I have shown you, Monsieur, that Vettori was no ordinary man. His quickness, his resource were at once put into play. He employed the few moments while confusion reigned in the house in preparing an explanation. His first act was to take the papers from the dead man—among which we afterwards found, not the whole, but number Three of the Formula; his second to fill the chemist's pocket with articles of jewelry snatched in haste from an adjoining room. This done he opened the door, and offered Mr. Adrian's guests a story of attempted burglary and assassination, which

Balsamo's own personality and actions colored but too well. No one expressed a doubt, and when the house was once more quiet, it was easy to run to Balsamo's cottage, call me up on the telephone, and warn me to leave the town before enquiries could be made of me.

There was nothing for it but to obey at once. Before dawn I joined Vettori in the cottage, and got such money as the chemist kept there. We made a hasty search through his effects but found nothing further of the Formula, and I stuffed all the papers remaining into the hanging cabinet in the little 'cuddy'—By the way, when I returned there three years later, that cabinet had been moved, and most of the papers taken out.*

Of course it is plain, that our intention was to return for a more thorough search, but a series of accidents prevented this. Vettori found his operations suddenly checked in the Eastern States, and himself menaced with serious danger of discovery. Retreat must be made rapidly and at once. I called for my daughter at her school and left for the Pacific Coast, where he joined me a month later. This life, for which I had sacrificed so much, soon became distasteful to me; my jealousy wearied Vettori, and our

*Note by P. A. This is an error. The paper had fallen through into the plaster. The account of the cabinet is given earlier in the story.

existence was one of scenes and storms, until one day, unhappy creature that I was! I attempted suicide. During the long illness which followed I was nursed by kind Catholic sisters, who turned my thoughts and my heart in the direction of repentance and expiation. It was with honest feeling and honest remorse that I told Vettori of my intention to take the veil, and drop out of his life forever.

Willing as he was that I should carry out this plan, (for he was heartily tired of me), I knew too much for my lover to consent to this latter clause. He must know where I was, and keep in touch with me. Affairs had not proved so lucrative since the deaths of Balsamo and Gellatly; a counterfeiting plant in San Francisco had been seized; everything indeed pointed to speedy emigration. Quebec was suggested to Vettori by Pierre Chavaignac as a suitable residence for himself, and a convent for me, so in pursuance of this plan he adopted the name of a dead French relative, rented a fine house in the suburbs, and sent for his daughter to come out to Canada. I entered at once upon my novitiate here, and took the veil about eight months ago. You would have thought, Monsieur, would you not, that at last peace and happiness were to descend on me? but my position was, if possible, more difficult than before. In order to pay my dower to the convent, Vettori had been obliged to assume the character

of a near relative, and I entered thus upon my religious life, sincerely a penitent, but for how much these kindly women have never guessed. The smuggling which Vettori carried on successfully for some time, bore always a menace; I trembled lest some chance should close my refuge to me, and I was forced to live an existence woven of deception. This was bad enough; it was rendered even more awkward by the problem presented by my own daughter Marguerite. She was now a woman, able to see and understand. A character at once indolent and passionate, she was what they call a good girl, having had no experience of life. I had no influence over her, and of me and mine she professed great horror, largely due to ignorance and the poisonous slanders told her by my late husband; but be this as it may, she knew too much for our entire safety, and she was a temperament just obstinate enough to be dangerous. I was obliged to give Vettori authority to handle her.

It is useless, Monsieur, to pretend that at this time, I felt any great affection for my child. We were uncongenial, and her judgment of me was bitterly harsh and intolerant. But I must set down here, in sad earnest, that I think the worst act of my wretched career was in delivering this girl over to the unscrupulous man whose life has just ended. I conceived myself endangered; he was always first with me;

she had been cruel, and I shut my eyes. What arguments, what powers he employed to conquer and terrorize her, I do not know, but certainly she was forced to dwell under his roof as companion to his own unamiable daughter, and as his tacit accomplice. Such, Monsieur, were the relative positions of the persons in the Maison de l'Orme, when your arrival precipitated the crisis in this extraordinary drama.

Chance no doubt, or the habit of constant watchfulness led Vettori, now de Pétry, to read your assumed name upon the register of the Frontenac. He had too much at stake to let pass a coincidence however trifling, and he saw you at once. You must remember the interview. You stated calmly that your errand in Quebec was to see that Chavaignac who lived in de Pétry's house as his butler, Dufour. You were easy and firm. In all you said, he seemed to read a knowledge of himself and his affairs indescribably dangerous. He rushed home and took counsel with his confederates. No one of them had ever heard of any family left by the murdered Gellatly, but it was a possibility, and it was evident you could not be left at large in Quebec. Thus came your invitation to dinner, and before admitting you to the house you were identified at the gate and found to be alone. You were then retained by the secret dismissal of your driver, and afterwards by a surveillance over your movements. I ought to mention

here, Monsieur, that at the first, de Pétry had been willing to admit the chance of your ignorance, the possibility of mere coincidences in this affair. These my daughter vehemently asserted all through, and she was right, yet did not everything point to the contrary?

The week which followed was one to Vettori of growing anxieties. He had counted on your mailing or receiving letters; you did neither. You must have been remarkably adroit and bold to baffle and confuse him as you did, for at every point he seemed to feel that you held vitally important knowledge in reserve. Your absolute disregard of your own danger maddened him by its suggestion of secret allies, of forces held in reserve. Stung by the mystery, and struggling against a growing sense of panic, they tried unsuccessfully to threaten you. Marguerite however, strong in her own opinion of your ignorance, gave you warning, upon which de Pétry locked her in her room, and sent for me.

Threatened at first by the common danger, my own interview with you threatened me with a particular danger in connection with Balsamo's death. The fact that you revived the matter of the Formula made things worse rather than better, for I suspected Balsamo's diary of containing entries and names perilous to us all. At de Pétry's wish I had made a trip with Marguerite, (on the excuse to my religious

superiors of a dying relative who might be good for a bequest) a month or so before, to the cottage in search of the diary and papers. I found the cabinet moved and the bulk of the papers missing; the one or two sheets left I destroyed.* with my very own hands. Your avowed real name brought the danger much closer, and I advised de Pétry to send Marguerite away at once. I did not report to him the whole of my talk with you, however, for the reason that Marguerite's state had touched my heart and I was anxious if it could be done safely, to have her finally released. This was my first and only treachery to the dead man.

Here ends my personal action in the affair, for I was obliged to return at once to the convent, where I awaited developments in unimaginable anxiety. Marguerite tells me you obtained number Two of the Formula from Chavagnac and two of de Pétry's three numbers from Pasqualino. You had suggested to de Pétry on parting that you had given my daughter important papers, which was untrue, and I fail to understand this error.* However, de Pétry waited some time before attempting to fly to his retreat in the mountains, and would

*Note by P. A. This is what I saw. Chapter 2.

*Note by P. A. The reader has gathered my suggestion to be a ruse, as narrated in Chapter XIV.

have waited longer, but for the events immediately following Dufour's death.

What took place at Bon Ange Gardien, Monsieur, you know better than I. All my part in this chronicle of disgrace I have set down here as truly as I can. There seems at last an end to deceit, a chance for the peace I crave. It lies in your hands, Mr. Adrian, whether this shall be permitted; and in narrating all that has passed in honesty, neither glossing over nor omitting nor evading my own share of guilt, I have tried to prove to you the sincerity of my penitence, my claim to your silence and your aid. Surely my acts have not been without punishment, and there are but few years left to me for tears and prayers.

I beg to remain, Monsieur,

Faithfully yours,

MARIANNA BALSAMO.

(In religion Sister Marie Dolores.)

This narrative came after I had been at Ashuelot about ten days; and we read it together, Cecil and I, while seated under that big oak-tree which had been the starting-point of my adventure. As I turned page after page, and noted the confirmation of all my theories, the justification of most of my actions;—so that, though striking in the dark my every blow had told,—I confess I was filled with pride, and

the first confidence I had felt for weeks. For the knowledge that Cecil cared for me and had promised to be my wife, had hardly even elated me; under all the circumstances I had been deeply uncertain and humbled, so that I was in need of a tonic to stimulate my self-confidence.

Of course Mr. Adrian had received the formula, together with a sufficient account of my experiences; at which he had grunted as usual though not in a manner of displeasure. Beyond this there had fallen a pause; we had avoided discussing the Quincunx at meals and instead he talked of indifferent subjects with a sort of gruff and rough sociability, which I had not seen in him before. There was no reason to suppose that he had any inkling of the true situation as yet; but he could not be kept in the dark much longer. Cecil I could see, was made nervous as each succeeding day passed without an explanation, but she felt my mood of perplexity and so forebore to hurry me.

The truth is I was thinking hard. I had done my task, my check was in bank, and I had undoubtedly gained a certain distance in my uncle's esteem; more than this I dared

not say. How could I, in my position, with my poor little mother waiting so lonely and patient in New York, how could I think of marriage, and speak of it, to Uncle Adrian, about his daughter! Yet speak I must ere long as became a man of honor.

"What do you think?" I asked Cecil, as we turned the last page of Marianna's story.

"That you are a genius, of course!" she replied, prompt and loyally. I put her hand against my lips.

"Dear, I was not asking for such praise, sweet as it is to me; I only meant, what do you think of the moment, when I hand him this, to speak to your father? Will it not be a good chance?"

"Just as you like Phil," she answered, with a look of combined relief and alarm.

"If it were a question of liking," I pursued somewhat grimly, "I should never mention it to him at all. He will probably shoot me at sight."

Cecil gravely shook her head. "No," she said sagely, "but he may swear."

"He does that if his breakfast is late. Has he no reserves?"

"I have often wondered," said she, "but there was Balsamo, he wasn't shot."

"I am flattered by the comparison! Well, I shall try," and I stood up looking all about me. It was a September noon, cool and still. No one was in sight. "Had you not better give me a last kiss, dear? Because you may never see me alive again."

"Foolish!" cried Cecil; but she gave it to me, and her hand, when I touched it, was cold. I felt much more cheerful, when at last I left her, and with the narrative rolled up in my pocket, walked briskly up to the house to seek my uncle in his study.

"This has just come, sir, and I would like you to read it," said I, as I gave it to him. "It's a full explanation of all that puzzled us; and it shows too that I was not wrong in some of my wild speculations."

"Some young men have luck," grumbled Mr. Adrian as he took the papers, "and it doesn't hurt them unless they expect it to last."

"Indeed, I wish I could," I returned in all sincerity, "but let me hear your opinion on this."

Mr. Adrian drew at his cigar, tilted back his office-chair, and began to read. I sat opposite him, quietly enough, twirling my cap and wondering why the palms of my hands stayed

damp so persistently. The clock ticked. Through the window-pane a golden tree-branch was lifted against the blue, and a white bird flashed across it. A white shadow flitted by on the piazza, entered the adjoining room and rustled about in there. I knew who it was trying to give me courage.

Uncle Adrian rattled the stiff sheets as he turned them, and re-read certain paragraphs, glanced sharply in my direction like a tutor examining a pupil, grunted and read on. Finally, he ended and laid the story upon his desk.

"Well," said he.

"Well?" said I.

"I suppose you think highly of all that?" he asked, pulling at his cigar.

"No more than is natural," I answered, and would have gone on, only that the white shadow, grown impatient, flitted past the window again and distracted my attention.

"I confess," allowed Mr. Adrian grudgingly, "there were some good points about what you did. But doesn't it strike you that you wasted time, and put the whole enterprise in peril a great deal too often for the sake of that lunatic Balsamo's daughter?"

"It was a mere question of humanity—one had no choice," I answered, and his rejoinder surprised me.

"I suppose not," he said gravely, and added half to himself: "Anyhow it is a disposition that would do no harm; and one women would be inclined to like."

I could not make head or tail of this, and could only suppose I had misunderstood him. He then continued briskly.

"Well, Philip, have you any plans for the future? Your royalty on Balsamo's formula can hardly be available yet awhile. What do you intend to do with your capital and yourself?"

It was certainly as near an opening as we were likely to get. I took breath.

"I meant to consult with you about that, sir. So far I have found no chance in New York, and of course I have my mother to think of."

While I watched his face, I noticed that, strangely enough, it was he who seemed embarrassed. He laid aside his cigar and forgot it; and for once in his life, he wriggled.

"I was wondering about all that," he observed; then with an odd irrelevancy, "I, myself, believe in the foreign ideas about children.

Young people do not know their own minds, and all important decisions should be made for them by their elders. My girl has been brought up that way; and she will do whatever I say and believe it is right. She knows I will decide what is best for her."

"Of course," I replied faintly.

"All this American independent nonsense won't weigh with me. Cecil knows that, and you had better learn it. All depends whether you are a dutiful, sensible lad, who knows on which side his bread is buttered, or the fibbertigibbet I first thought you."

He paused, and I waited. I had not the slightest suspicion of his meaning. I waited for some bitter, unavoidable sentence of exile, some determination which should kill all my hopes at a blow. A sort of artificial stiffness came to me in time, to keep me calm.

"I've no son," went on this strange old man. "and I've always wished that someone of my name, would carry on the works when I am gone. You have a giddy tongue enough; but your head seems to contain a little sense behind it; and you are less like your father..."

...."Than I mean to be in future," I interjected, justifying his estimate out of sheer ner-

vousness. He frowned, but my remarks of this nature had ceased to offend him.

"Therefore," he proceeded, "if you care to try the Works, I'm willing to try you. At the bottom of the ladder at first, mind, but with a view to learning the business. As to my other plan, as I said, Cecil's a dutiful, obedient girl; she appears to like you—you are not offensive-looking, and I can see no reason why she should refuse to marry you if she knows I wish it."

My silence, under this blow, was absolute. He shifted restlessly in his chair, and went on declaring his ideas on parental authority.

"It's best she should marry—and marry someone I know all about. Then there's the name; and moreover she knows I would decide for the best. As for love and all that nonsense, she might just as well try it on you. Anyhow," he wound up with an outburst of violent conviction, "she'll do as her father says, and that's all there is to it."

I was still breathless, and Uncle Adrian grew impatient.

"What's the matter?" said he. "Haven't I made it clear?"

I could only nod. "Any objections?" he demanded truculently.

"Oh no, no!" I hastened to reply, but again my emotion overpowered me. And for the life of me I dared not show him what that emotion was.

"Look here, Philip,—is there any nonsense? Any entanglement?" The note in his voice was one of honest anxiety, and it suddenly brought home to me the reality of this plan to him, and the pride which I knew lay near and sensitive under that crusty and dry exterior. So I could only rise, and turn to him frankly with outstretched hand.

"No indeed, sir, nothing of the kind. On the contrary I never met a woman whom I could prefer to my cousin. It lies with her. And I shall be very glad to enter the works in any capacity you please, which has a future."

"You're a sensible fellow, and I'm glad to see it," he said, in tones of satisfaction. "I answer for Cecil; but we won't hurry her, eh? And now sit down and let us talk business!"

He motioned me to a seat, and I, still as in a dream, obeyed him. My uncle took a fresh cigar, and while lighting it, with an air of conferring a brevet, he handed me the financial section of the New York Evening Post.

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